NAPOLEON'S INVASION OF RUSSIA

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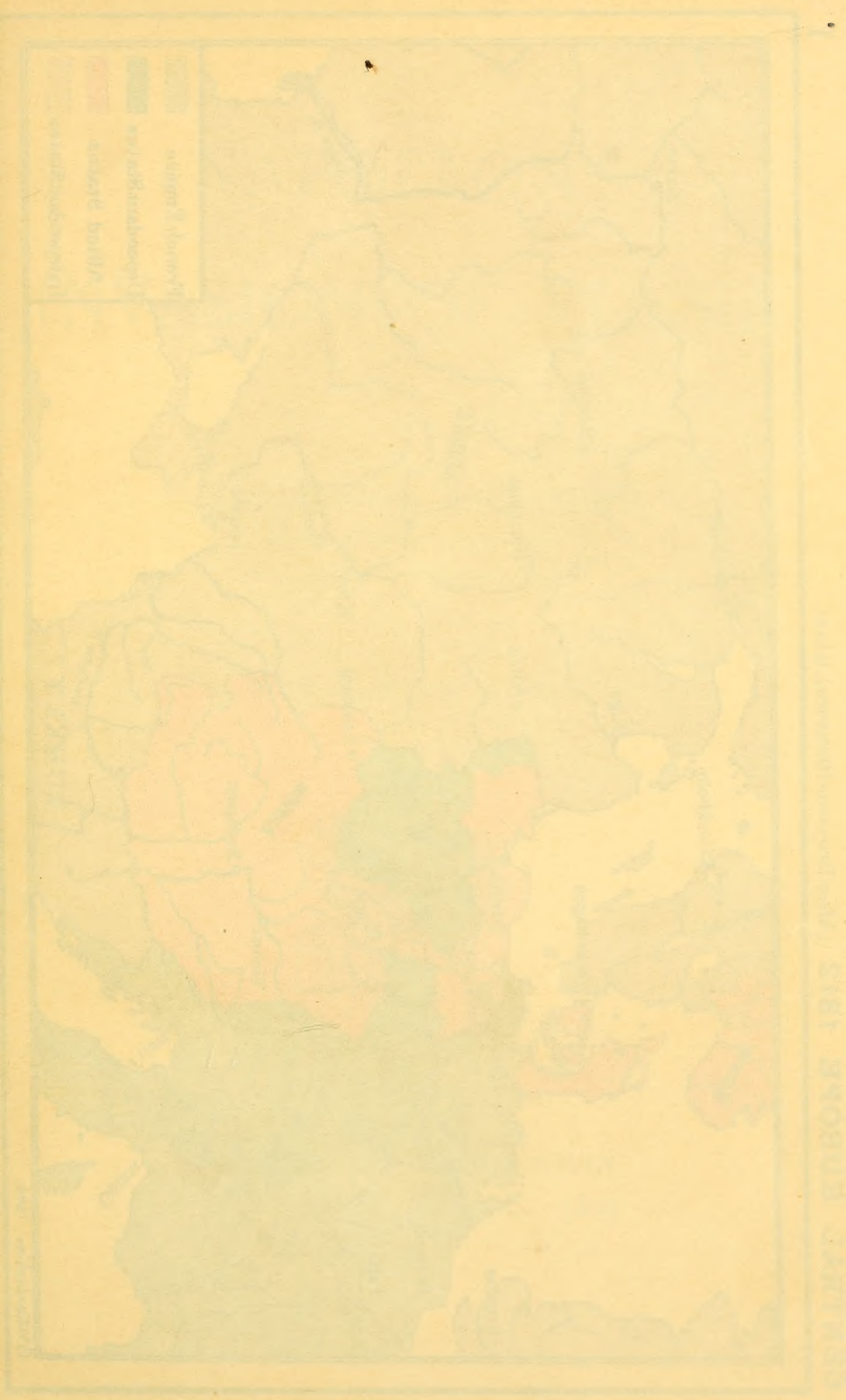
NAPOLEON'S INVASION OF RUSSIA



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B.V. Darbishire 1899.

NAPOLEON'S INVASION OF RUSSIA

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WITH MAPS AND PLANS

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PREFACE.

Books about Napoleon abound, but I have never met one which dealt satisfactorily with his greatest military enterprise, the greatest in authentic history. Original materials for a history of the Russian expedition abound. There are many hundreds of Napoleon's own letters; there are despatches and manifestoes on the other side. There are elaborate military histories, written by eye-witnesses, mostly too detailed and occasionally too technical for the ordinary reader. There are personal memoirs without end, some recording only the writers' experiences, others which, though personal in form, were written by men whose position gave them more or less knowledge of the general course of events. There are state papers, published and unpublished, that throw light on the diplomatic relations of Napoleon, his avowed enemies, and his reluctant allies. Out of these materials it ought to be possible to construct a history which shall set forth the causes of the invasion of Russia, shall make the military events intelligible to the civilian reader, and bring out the reasons why its failure was inevitable.

Napoleon's Correspondence, in which must be included a certain number of letters not found in the official edition, furnishes very valuable evidence, if due allowance be made

for his disregard of truth whenever he could serve a purpose by perverting it. The orders actually given show correctly the dates and nature of his preparations for the war. From them can be inferred with fair certainty what he intended to do, and what he knew of the state of things, at each moment of the campaign. The narrative contained in the bulletins is falsified so outrageously that they are worthless, except as illustrating Napoleon's character. The facts however are recorded so fully by many witnesses that there is little difficulty in ascertaining the truth.

The best authority of all is undoubtedly Chambray, who served in the artillery throughout the campaign. He had access to the French War Office, and took great pains to procure accurate statements of numbers, etc. Writing after the Russian official history had appeared, he had before him similar information about the enemy. He is thoroughly impartial in spirit, and if he makes mistakes at all, does so through lack of information not available when he wrote. Chambray's work contains, in the text and in the appendix, a large number of highly important documents. Many of these are to be found in Napoleon's Correspondence, but by no means all. The most valuable of them are despatches sent by Berthier in pursuance of instructions from Napoleon which are not extant. Vaudoncourt on one or two points obtained better information about things on the Russian side than Chambray, but his style is less clear, and his narrative is defaced by an unwarranted tone of contempt towards the enemy. Ségur's history of the expedition has attracted much more notice than it deserves: he lets his bitter hostility to Napoleon colour his narrative, and he is far from trustworthy as to

facts. Labaume gives useful information as to the 4th corps, to which he belonged; he too is hostile to Napoleon, but this does not warp his views.

The Russian campaign fills many pages in the memoirs of Fezensac, a colonel in Ney's corps, who is a vivid narrator, and a most valuable witness as to matters which came within his own observation. If Marbot had been equally trustworthy, he would have contributed usefully, since he was in Oudinot's corps, which was left on the Dwina, and with Victor's bore the brunt of the fighting at the Berezina. He deals however in romance, and is continually inaccurate in his statements about things which are fully known: hence his testimony is worthless. The narrative of Baron Fain, one of Napoleon's secretaries, contains some useful documents, but is otherwise valueless. From the countless memoirs written by men of lower rank some interesting details may be gathered. Most of them give the impression of honestly recording what the writers remembered or believed, though some few indulge in unblushing fiction. One cavalry officer, for instance, relates that he went on a foraging expedition from Moscow to the neighbourhood of Poltava, fully 400 miles off, that the whole regiment obtained remounts, and brought back a large convoy of grain and fodder, in less than a fortnight!

Buturlin, the Russian official historian of the campaign, wrote very soon after it. He had access to all official returns and other documents, and goes into full detail. His style is dull, and his position compelled him to act as apologist for Kutusov, the Russian commander-in-chief; his facts however are generally trustworthy. Danilevski, who wrote some twenty years later at the request of

Nicolas I., adds little to Buturlin except on two or three points, but he is more readable. The reminiscences of Duke Eugene of Wurtemberg, who commanded a Russian division throughout, profess to give only what he himself witnessed, but they are of great value in elucidating more than one highly important incident in which he was personally concerned. Sir Robert Wilson, the one English eye-witness, saw things of course from the Russian side. He had excellent opportunities and good military judgment, though perhaps a little prone to over-estimate his own importance. He is an unsparing critic of the shortcomings of the Russians, particularly of Kutusov.

In a different category again are the writings of the two great theoretic strategists who took part in the campaign, Jomini and Clausewitz. The former has greatly marred his Life of Napoleon by pretending that the Emperor is telling his own story: hence one hardly knows whether the excuses put forward for Napoleon's mistakes are merely dramatic, or represent the writer's real opinion. Nevertheless his pages give a good compendious view of the whole campaign, fuller of facts, though for that very reason less clear in outline, than that of Clausewitz. The book of the latter contains his own personal experiences—he took part in the Russian retreat on Moscow, and was then sent off on other duty—mixed up with an admirable summary of the campaign, with criticisms on the general strategy of both parties.

The original authorities, whatever their divergences of opinion or of statement, agree to destroy the fiction that the failure of the invasion was due to the cold. This was propagated so sedulously by Napoleon himself, and by his admirers, that it has become an established fact for the

uncritical many who are contented with vague notions about history. It has also, like the rest of the Napoleonic legend, found more credence than it deserved among people better informed, partly through the literary skill with which it was presented, partly through the profound impression which Napoleon made on his generation, on friends and foes alike. The genuine evidence shows conclusively that the cold did no more than convert defeat into destruction, and ruin whatever faint chance may have been left of partially redeeming the failure at the last moment.

For the political side of the history, Napoleon's own Correspondence exhibits his behaviour to his allies. The really important sources of information are however the state papers of other countries. Oncken was the first to explore the various German archives, and to establish beyond all doubt, what was before surmised, the true nature of the secret relations between Austria and Prussia, and of the attitude of both towards the two great contending Empires. He deals with the diplomacy of 1811—2, however, rather as introductory to the main topic of his book, the relations of Austria and Prussia in 1813. Hence he does not dwell on the secret intercourse of Austria and Russia, though he had read, and occasionally quotes, the Vienna papers. Nor did Oncken obtain access to the records of the British Foreign Office, which throw frequent light on the course of affairs, especially in the north. From both sources I have derived information, hitherto so far as I know unpublished, which mostly serves to explain and to confirm views already entertained, rather than to suggest new ones. My thanks are due to the authorities of the Record Office, and still more of the k.k. Haus-Hof- und Staats-Archiv at Vienna, for their

invariable courtesy, and assistance in discovering documents likely to be of service.

I have also to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Mr. W. R. Morfill, the Oxford Reader in the Slavonic languages, for much help in dealing with the Russian nomenclature. A few Russian names, such as Moscow, have established English forms: in transliterating all other Russian names, and in choosing between Polish and Russian forms of names in the border lands, I have been guided entirely by Mr. Morfill's advice.

HEREFORD B. GEORGE.

Oxford,
25th March, 1899.

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(*To be found at the end of the book.*)

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MAP II.—Western Russia and Poland: the theatre of the first stage of the campaign.

MAP III.—The country from Smolensk to Moscow: to illustrate the second stage of the campaign.

MAP IV.—The country near Moscow.

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[Nos. II.—V. are drawn, so far as natural features are concerned, from a recent map of Russia; but the roads are inserted according to the careful description in Buturlin's contemporary history.]

PLAN A.—Smolensk and Lubino.

PLAN B.—Borodino.

PLAN C.—Maloyaroslavetz.

PLAN D.—Viasma.

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[All these are derived from Russian sources, chiefly from Buturlin. The French plans, where they are not copied from the Russian, are generally either incorrect or vague.]

NAPOLEON'S INVASION OF RUSSIA

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

The causes of the invasion of Russia, the first decided stage of Napoleon's downfall, must be looked for in the Peace of Tilsit and before it. It is said with truth that Napoleon at Tilsit took the wrong course, when, instead of being content with an advantageous peace, he agreed with the Tzar for a virtual partition of Europe. The secret articles of the treaty, by which each Emperor was to preserve a benevolent neutrality while the other spoiled his neighbours by force, were perhaps not more unprincipled than some other treaties in which the personal or dynastic interests of the contracting parties were alone considered, but nevertheless they were obviously iniquitous. Alexander, whose impulses were on the whole honourable, might be blinded for the time by the prospect of great acquisitions, but could hardly fail sooner or later to feel that he had been the accomplice of robbery. Such considerations might not in themselves cause the Tzar to reverse his policy, but they were sure to give additional vigour to his action whenever he ultimately found himself in hostility to Napoleon. The accomplice might well think that the

more zealously he combated the arch-robber the better he would atone for his crime. And Alexander's confidence in Napoleon's friendship could not fail to be shaken by observing that Napoleon was sacrificing to Russia, as he himself insisted in his letters, the oldest allies of France. But the agreement at Tilsit to enter into Napoleon's Continental System, which could not be long adhered to without material ruin to Russia, was the real determining cause of the Russian war. Napoleon would pardon no defection, no lukewarmness in this respect; he openly and repeatedly declared that he would fight any power that failed rigidly to maintain the system which, according to his own arrogant phrase, he had established *as law* for the whole of Europe. When Russia at length refused any longer to adhere strictly to the Continental System, Napoleon had either to confess himself powerless to enforce it or prepare to attack Russia. In other words, it was Napoleon's intense desire to crush England which took him to Moscow.

Lanfrey, in a striking passage (Vol. III., p. 20), tells how the city of Amiens erected a triumphal arch, with the inscription *Chemin de l'Angleterre*, for the First Consul to pass under in 1803, and points out how truly it was the road to England on which he then entered, though at the end was not the triumph of which he dreamed, but—the *Bellerophon*. The rupture of the Peace of Amiens was as definitely and visibly the adoption of the wrong course as was ever the choice between two diverging paths represented in fable or allegory as offered to man. He had one of the grandest opportunities ever given to mortal, if he had been capable of using it. France was longing for peace, for time to consolidate her new institutions, for a revival of

commerce. Thanks mainly to Napoleon's victories she had no equal in military strength, no single enemy who could be really formidable to her on land. England was at least equally anxious for peace, and there was enough of sympathy in England for the original aspirations of the French Revolution to have made it no difficult task for an ideal ruler of France to win her friendship. She had sacrificed many conquests for the sake of peace; she had suffered so heavily during the ten years of war that she was quite willing to do so. But her power was not only not broken, it was greater at sea than ever, and Nelson's victories had made the nation fully conscious of its strength. Napoleon may be excused for not having foreseen Trafalgar with its consequences. He never realised the conditions of naval warfare, or understood why it was hopeless for him to fight England on the sea. Still less could he have been expected to anticipate the ruinous pressure which English naval power would be able to exert by closing against France all ocean commerce. But he did know, or might have known, that the spirit of England was unbroken, and would endure neither insult nor wilful aggression. And he might have seen where his true interests lay. He was eager, naturally and laudably eager, for colonies and commerce; there was only one power in the world which could deprive France of them. The most obvious calculation of common sense would have dictated, if not friendship with that power, at least peaceful relations for the present.

It was not however in Napoleon's nature to be prudent, or to be peaceful. Insatiable of power, impatient of any control or limitation to his absolute will, conscious of his own transcendent ability to gain everything attainable by military force, and incapable of really appreciating any

other forms of force, he persisted in his career of aggression. The ink was scarcely dry on the Treaty of Amiens before he proceeded to fresh annexations, announced and insisted on in language deliberately insulting to England. He demanded peremptorily that the British government should expel the Bourbon princes and their open adherents, and forcibly silence the press, which abounded in hostile comments on Napoleon's proceedings, almost as violent in tone as Napoleon's own daily language in the *Moniteur*. The Addington ministry answered softly enough, without however turning away the calculated wrath of the First Consul: but on neither point had they the power, even if they had formed the wish, to make any practical concession. England would not have endured for a moment any tampering either with the right of asylum, or with the liberty of the press within legal limits. England on her side delayed to evacuate Malta, with perfect technical right, since the conditions laid down in the treaty as antecedent to the evacuation had not yet been fulfilled, but doubtless also in the hope of being able to retain the island permanently. Napoleon naturally made the most of this, declaring that he would sooner see the English in possession of the Faubourg St. Antoine than at Malta. The reply was obvious: we adhere to the treaty, neither more nor less. The spirit of the English nation was rapidly roused; better open war, it was felt, than a nominal peace during which the enemy strengthens himself at leisure to resume war at his own time. The formal breach ultimately came from the English side, as Napoleon would have liked a little more time to build men-of-war; but the responsibility was none the less on him, the responsibility for twelve years more of war, for millions of human lives expended in

furthering or resisting his ambition. The fatal step was taken which led to his downfall. After trying in vain for more than two years to organise a feasible scheme for the invasion of England, Napoleon, now Emperor, turned upon the allies whom Pitt had at length induced to unite with him against the common enemy. By the crushing blows of Ulm and Austerlitz he compelled Austria to sue for peace on very hard terms. The next year, when Prussia at length mustered up courage to resist him, he overthrew her even more decisively. Then came the turn of Russia, the steady though not very active or efficient ally of both the German powers. Here Napoleon's success was not so rapid or so overwhelming, but his great victory at Friedland made the Tzar think that he had done quite enough for states which could no longer strike a blow for themselves, and peace was made at Tilsit.

It is noteworthy that, as early as October, 1802, in answer to English remonstrances against Napoleon's virtual annexation of Switzerland, the First Consul ordered a reply[1] to be sent, in which he threatened if war broke out again to conquer the Continent and close its ports against England. The Berlin decree, which followed immediately on the battle of Jena, was an attempt to put this idea into operation. When he set out for the campaign of Pultusk and Eylau, he talked of conquering England on the Vistula. When he met the Tzar at Tilsit, the first condition which he laid down was that Russia should join with him against England. The Milan decree followed, which added something to the weight of

[1] Talleyrand to Otto, 1 Brumaire, XI. The substance of this despatch, which is obviously in Napoleon's style, is given by Thiers but it is not printed in Napoleon's Correspondence.

the yoke that pressed upon Napoleon's subjects and vassals; but paper fulminations had not much effect on Great Britain.

It is unnecessary to enter into the old controversy whether either of the contending powers could justify resorting to the extreme measures actually promulgated, by Napoleon in the Berlin and Milan decrees, by the British government in their Orders in Council. The essential difference between them lay in the fact that the sea power could enforce its will, while the land power could not. It is equally needless to describe, after Captain Mahan's admirable treatment of the subject, the efforts made by Napoleon to exclude British commerce from the Continent. Obviously the Continental System, like persecution, could succeed only if perfectly thorough, in other words only if every people in Europe concurred. That they should do so willingly was inconceivable: they had no motive for suffering serious privations in order to please the conqueror who had already trampled on them, and to injure a nation which only desired peacefully to supply their wants. The question was whether Napoleon could compel acquiescence, either by actual authority within the regions under his own direct sway, or by terror operating on the governments of the states still nominally at least independent. In his own dominions he more or less succeeded, at the cost of employing whole armies as police. France, as the most fertile portion of Europe, and as having suffered but little materially, whatever she had lost in men, by Napoleon's wars, was better able to bear the burden than plundered Italy and Germany, though even France suffered from a very severe commercial crisis in 1811; and they again felt it less than Sweden or Russia.

Sweden depended for her very existence as a civilised community on the export of timber, pitch, iron, bulky articles for which there was no possible carriage except by sea, and for which by far the best market was in England. And if Russia with her vast territory was more self-supporting, her produce was of the same bulky character. Italy and Germany were occupied by Napoleon's armies; they could not but submit to his requirements, though the score of hatred against him, already accumulating in Germany, was thereby rapidly increased. Austria, having lost her seaboard, had no immediate interest in the matter. Sweden had hitherto yielded to dictation, had declared war on Great Britain, had elected a Frenchman Crown Prince, and was reckoned by Napoleon as one of his vassals. It is true that she was out of his reach, for he was powerless to cross the narrowest arm of the sea; but Swedish Pomerania was defenceless, England was wisely long-suffering, and Sweden was for many reasons very slow in deciding to act independently. Russia was the one power which, while acutely feeling the pressure of the Continental System, was in a position to venture on repudiating it. She was not inaccessible to Napoleon's arms, but she had great elements of strength, and the Tzar came gradually to the conclusion that the risks of war were a less evil than slow strangulation by the loss of all external trade. He had his grievances, sufficient to form a ground for war if he desired it, but he had no motive whatever for seeking a quarrel with France. Napoleon was free to choose between abandoning his passionate wish to reduce Great Britain to submission—for one breach in the Continental System would be as destructive to it as cutting through a single dyke to an extensive system of defences against flood—and

making war to force it on Russia. His decision was the first great step towards his ruin, but no one who knew Napoleon's character could doubt what the decision would be.

The Continental System had therefore led its author, as his enemies hoped and expected, to a gigantic war. It had failed in the way anticipated, through victims of Napoleon's tyranny at length defying him to force his will on them any longer; and as we look back after the lapse of nearly a century, we can see that failure was inevitable. But this is not in itself conclusive evidence that it was a blunder to attempt it, if the matter be looked at from Napoleon's point of view. He regarded England as his irreconcilable enemy, who must be destroyed at any cost. This was not true, for there was never a time when the British government would not have concluded a fair peace, with anything like reasonable assurance that it was honestly meant. But it was true in the sense that Napoleon was incapable of making reasonable concessions, and that his conduct after the Treaty of Amiens was calculated to suggest more than misgivings as to how he would keep peace if made. Of Napoleon as he exhibited himself England was the irreconcilable enemy; and his only potent weapon against her, assuming his inferiority at sea, was to minimise the value of her commerce by excluding it from all markets within his control. Failure naturally left him in a worse position than if he had never tried; the question is whether failure was inevitable. It is not hard to see after the event that the virtual monopoly of all ocean commerce, together with such trade with the Continent as eluded Napoleon's vigilance, supplied England so largely with the sinews of war that, if she had

the perseverance requisite to hold out, she was practically certain to be able to bear the strain longer than the Continent would endure the injury to all material interests inflicted at Napoleon's will and pleasure. This was the fundamental idea of Wellington's policy in Spain; if resistance to Napoleon could only be kept alive long enough in the Peninsula, the nations of Europe would once more combine against him. Wellington's anxiety, however, was whether the English ministry would have the moral courage to hold on long enough; and their lack of long-sighted wisdom in relation to Spanish affairs makes one doubt whether they really saw things in the true light. They could not fail to know that they had the silent sympathy of the populations of nearly all Europe, and of most of the governments; but they were aware also that these governments were not unreasonably in deadly fear of Napoleon. England was suffering cruelly, was within measurable distance of total economic collapse; if the knowledge of this fact, and the renewed disappointments as to support on the Continent, had led the British government to give way, it would not have been astonishing, hardly even blameworthy. Like Alexander at Tilsit, England might have felt that she had done and suffered enough for allies who could not or would not help themselves, and that she herself would be safe beyond the Channel if she abandoned the common cause. That this view did not prevail, that England held on to the triumphant close, was due partly no doubt to native stubbornness, partly also to the care Napoleon took never to commit himself to anything that could be deemed conciliatory.

Napoleon, as all the world knows, was a most

unscrupulous liar; no credence whatever can be given to his historical statements, unless perhaps where by inadvertence they tell against himself. Nor has any one ever excelled him in audacity of false assertions made in diplomatic correspondence or in public affairs generally, where he had an end to gain. Hence it is only with hesitation that one accepts any declaration of his as expressing his real sentiments. Nevertheless there is much in his Correspondence which points to the conclusion that he had really worked himself into a genuine belief that the English were the enemies of the human race, and that his Continental System was perfectly sound and just. Ignorance of economic principles might account for his requiring Prussia to levy an export duty on wheat, as so much gained from the English. Wilful refusal to look facts in the face might account for his repeated assertions, in spite of the strongest representations from the United States, that there was no such thing afloat as an honest neutral flag, because all ships, whatever nationality they assumed, were really British. But it is scarcely possible that even Napoleon should have declared, in a memorandum[1] instructing his ministers to try to come to terms with the United States, that the Berlin and Milan decrees were *des lois fondamentales, dérivant de la nature des choses*, unless he had in some sense believed in their justice. Again, he used to Eugene Beauharnais,[2] as a reason for requiring that all Italian silk should be sent to France, the singular argument, "si le commerce anglais triomphe sur mer, c'est parceque les Anglais y sont les plus forts; il est donc convenable, puisque la France est la

[1] Napoleon's Correspondence, 17,669.

[2] Nap. Corr. 16,024.

plus forte sur terre, qu'elle y fasse aussi triompher son commerce: sans quoi tout est perdu." As he had no need to give any reason for the order to Eugene beyond his own will and pleasure, it is impossible to suppose that he deliberately used one which he knew to be absurd. His whole mind was apparently saturated with the thought that in one way only could he become effectively master of Europe. He was perhaps not always confident of success; the very reiterations, when urging the Tzar to make every effort to destroy English commerce, of his confident predictions that little more is needed to ruin England, sound like attempts to stifle his own misgivings. On one occasion he gave utterance to them in a very singular manner. When the Russian envoy Chernishev, returning to Paris after a special mission to Stockholm, informed Napoleon that Sweden was almost ruined by the loss of her trade with England, he replied that no doubt that was the case, "'mais que tout le monde étant réduit par les circonstances à souffrir, il était juste qu'elle en eût aussi sa part.' La dessus à mon grand étonnement, sa Majesté dit fort vite, à voix basse et avec un mouvement d'impatience, que si les Anglais tenaient encore pendant quelque temps, elle ne savait plus ce que cela deviendrait, ni que faire."[1] It never occurred to him apparently that the situation was altogether of his own creating. Whether this was only a passing phase of discouragement, or whether like Pharaoh he "hardened his heart" against the promptings of prudence, there is no other evidence to show.

[1] Chernishev to the Tzar, the ninth of April, 1811, in vol. xxi. of Collection of Russian State Papers. N.B.—All Russian documents are quoted with dates according to the Russian calendar.

Whether he really considered his own course to be just and politic, or was unable to bring his mind to make an open confession of failure, or was merely actuated by an overwhelming desire to have his own way, the result was the same. He undertook an expedition so vast in its scale that it could only succeed by a miracle, and he failed in it even more disastrously than his worst enemies had ventured to anticipate.

CHAPTER II.

NAPOLEON AND HIS ALLIES.

The marriage of Napoleon with Maria Louisa of Austria, agreed on while negotiations for an alliance with a Russian princess were still pending, was the first definite breach in the good understanding between France and Russia which dated from Tilsit. There is no reason to believe that Alexander ever seriously contemplated giving his sister to Napoleon, but the most ordinary courtesy prescribed that Napoleon should wait for an answer to his own request before turning elsewhere. But his vanity could not resist the temptation of representing the greatest powers in Europe as competing for the honour of supplying him with a bride. It was not the fact of his marrying an Austrian, but the mode in which it was arranged, which constituted a wilful insult to Russia. A year later, on the tenth of December, 1810, Napoleon made what proved to be his last annexations, adding to his immediate Empire a large slice of north Germany. The whole of the annexed territory was already under his control, and no reason was given save that new guarantees had become necessary. As he phrased it in his address on opening the session of the Corps Legislatif six months later, it was not French territory that he wanted to increase, "mais bien nos moyens maritimes." The purpose of closing the Continent against English trade

in the present, and the dim and distant hope of some day building up a fleet capable of bidding for supremacy at sea —these were the main subjects of interest to Napoleon at this time, and they pointed towards tightening his hold on the northern coasts of Germany. Unfortunately he ignored the fact that the most important of the dispossessed princes, the Duke of Oldenburg, was the Tzar's brother-in-law, and that therefore the annexation was a personal injury to Alexander, besides its being an obvious offence against international right forcibly in time of peace to deprive a sovereign in whom he did not even pretend to have found cause of offence. The Tzar fully understood the value of an undoubted grievance: he remonstrated firmly though courteously, rejecting the illusory offers of compensation to the Duke at some one else's expense which were made by Napoleon, who professed not to see that there was any grievance at all.

Just a month after the annexation of Oldenburg (the thirty-first of December, 1810, o.s.) the Tzar issued a commercial ukase by which he imposed duties on certain French goods, corresponding in some respects to the duties levied on French imports from Russia. This decree in no way modified the exclusion of English goods, which had been the cardinal point of the agreement entered into at Tilsit; and though Napoleon pretended that it was a breach of the treaty, it cannot be doubted that the Tzar was acting within his rights. Nevertheless Napoleon was not mistaken when he said to the King of Wurtemberg[1] that it implied a *je ne sais quoi* hostile to France and favourable to England. It is hardly probable that such a step should have been suddenly taken on the news of the annexation of Oldenburg.

[1] Nap. Corr. 17,553.

It was a deliberate act of policy, a declaration that the Tzar did not mean to obey Napoleon's behests; but it was rendered more emphatic by the date.

The powers of Europe understood the ukase in this sense and prepared themselves for the conflict which they felt sure would sooner or later result from the attitude of antagonism to France thus assumed by Russia. Months before this, however, Napoleon had been preparing for war, not hastily as if it had become imminent, but with the deliberation of one who seriously meditates an undertaking for which he believes that he can choose his own time. When Metternich had his farewell audience on the twentieth of September, 1810, Napoleon said to him, "War with Russia is in the nature of things." His Correspondence in the summer and autumn of 1810 contains many directions about the Prussian and Polish fortresses. In a letter to the King of Saxony[1] he urges the necessity of preparations against Russia, *qui porte une haine si forte au grand duché* (Warsaw), *qu'il faut se tenir en mesure*. In October he addressed to the Minister of War[2] an elaborate memorandum as to the organisation of two armies, one in Italy of 200,000 men, the other in Germany, also of 200,000 men, which the addition of Poles, Saxons, etc., would raise to 300,000. In it occurs the suggestive remark, that while the troops in Spain must on the whole be reckoned as having to stay[3] there, *cadres* for a certain number of battalions may be withdrawn for use in the other armies.

[1] Nap. Corr. 17,009.

[2] Nap. Corr. 17,000.

[3] It is singular that only a few days before he was sending orders to Massena *qu'il attaque et culbute les Anglais*, for he had sure information that Wellington had only 24,000 men, including Hill's force. Nap. Corr. 16,928.

It is all for the future, but it indicates that Napoleon was already contemplating not merely war, but a scheme of operations on the gigantic scale adopted in 1812. A little later we find him telling Clarke that he shall want 200,000 muskets to arm the Polish insurgents. All through the early months of 1811 incessant attention is paid to the army of Germany, to reinforcing Dantzic, fortifying Hamburg, etc. In April he bids Decrès send him full information as to means of placing a flotilla on the Baltic coast for use against Russia.[1] In the midst of them is a further indication that he considered the outbreak of war as within his own control—orders for a pontoon train to be made at Dantzic, to be ready by the first of January.

The language of diplomacy is naturally one-sided. It is scarcely reasonable to blame Napoleon for making the most, in his communications to the Tzar, of those acts of Russia which might indicate hostility towards France. Assurances of personal regard and fidelity to the pact of Tilsit, complaints that Russian troops had been transferred from the Danube to the Polish frontier, reproaches about the formation of intrenched camps and arming of fortresses—all these were the conventional counters in the game. Napoleon's assertions that he was doing nothing of the kind on his side were of course deliberate falsehoods; the pretence of guarding against possible English descents on the Baltic coast was obviously inapplicable to the arming of fortresses on the line of the Vistula. In diplomatic dignity, as well as straightforwardness, Alexander had the advantage. In replying to one of Napoleon's missives complaining of various movements of troops and other measures as wilfully aggressive, presented by the French ambassador, the Tzar

[1] Nap. Corr. 17,589.

produced a long list of the similar proceedings on Napoleon's side, and quietly asked Caulaincourt if these were acts of peace. As time went on, Napoleon abandoned the useless farce of denying his own armaments, and contented himself with declaring that if Alexander thought proper to negotiate sword in hand he must do the like. So far as the actual movements towards the Polish frontier were concerned, he could maintain with some show of truth that his were only counter preparations elicited by the action of Russia; for, as he pointed out, movements of troops in a country so huge took a very long time, and must therefore have been ordered some months before the result appeared. It was indeed a complete reply that the continued occupation of Germany by Napoleon's armies during the years of peace, and the active military organisation of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw under his one trustworthy dependent ally, the King of Saxony, were measures directly threatening to Russia, while his whole conduct was an indirect menace to every state which retained its independence. These things, however, might with a certain plausibility be justified as necessary to hold down the enemies whom Napoleon had conquered or forced into unwilling vassalage; and apart from them Russia was the first to move. This was inevitable, because her ruler knew that any independent action on his part entailed the risk of war with France, and therefore had to regard military preparation as a necessary accompaniment of deciding to consult his own commercial interests; but none the less it gave a superficial excuse for Napoleon's complaints.

Down to the last moment, long after he had fully made up his mind for war, Napoleon continued to profess unalterable regard for Alexander personally, and reluctance

to engage in war. He speaks as if perverse fate was forcing the rival powers into collision, against the will of both Emperors and against the true interests of both nations. On one occasion he even suggested that France and Russia were but as puppets of which the English pulled the strings. This idea, that the cause of the war is to be sought not in the voluntary action of Napoleon or any one else, but in impersonal fate, is seriously adopted in Tolstoi's remarkable novel. That it is absolutely false needs no proof: Russia alone would never have dreamed of beginning war if not attacked. But it is not equally clear that Napoleon did not in some sense believe it. He was somewhat of a fatalist: it is the only vestige of religious or quasi-religious belief discernible in him. And he had also, as has been already suggested, convinced himself that his Continental System was rooted in the nature of things, and must therefore be enforced whether he like it or not. Such a belief, if he really entertained it, was perhaps enough to justify the language used by Decrès and others, about the Emperor's brain being turned by too much success.

While his military preparations were being conducted with all his usual forethought and thoroughness, there are indications that during the critical year 1811 Napoleon's mind was less steadily than usual directed towards a definite purpose. Even before his famous monologue addressed to the Russian ambassador on the fifteenth of August, which was one of his stock devices for terrifying a contingent enemy, he turned a large amount of his attention to the old project of an invasion of England, though on a more modest scale. He was convinced, if his letters to his own ministers are any evidence, that England had so completely denuded

herself of troops for the Peninsula that she could not withstand the slightest attack at home.[1] "They know," he says to Decrès, "that nothing can stop 25,000 men from going and burning Chatham." His purpose fluctuated between a raid of this kind across the narrow seas to England and an expedition on a larger scale to Ireland; but that it was serious, and not a mere feint to alarm the English government, seems to be implied in his having gone himself to Boulogne in September, and having spent several weeks on the coast. Naval preparations were always slow and difficult, and the British fleet was as completely master of the sea as ever; whether the project was ever meant in earnest or not, it had to be abandoned, though Decrès was required to maintain a considerable flotilla at Boulogne, on the hypothesis that it would keep England in perpetual alarm.

Throughout the autumn and winter the work of preparation for the campaign, which it was now tacitly understood would certainly take place in the summer of 1812, went on vigorously. Strangely enough, the war in Spain, which had devoured so large a proportion of the resources of France ever since 1808, does not seem to have troubled the Emperor. It was really no nearer to a successful conclusion than it had been when Wellington landed in the Peninsula. The successes of the French on the east side were very far from compensating for Massena's failure to drive the English into the sea on the west. It has often been argued that Napoleon made a great mistake in not going to Spain in person. Had he done so, it is said, he could so effectually have directed the co-operation of the various armies as to compel Wellington to embark, after which Spanish resistance

[1] Nap. Corr. 17,846, 17,856, 17,875, 17,881, 17,909.

would speedily have collapsed. The nature of the country and the existence of the guerillas must, however, have rendered the task a long and difficult one; and it is obvious that Napoleon's absence in the Peninsula would have afforded a favourable opportunity for Prussia to throw off the yoke, and for the Tzar to head a European coalition. It might perhaps have been safely ventured in 1810, but the need was not apparent till after Massena's retreat, and by that time it was too late, unless on the impossible assumption that Napoleon should abandon his Continental System. He can hardly have supposed that Marmont with inferior resources would achieve what Massena had failed in: he was doubtless content to maintain the *status quo* in Spain until he had conquered Russia. Moreover, he always tended to undervalue Wellington as being too cautious, and scarcely realised the significance of the stormings of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajos. By the time the latter blow fell the Russian war was virtually begun, and Napoleon could not, had he wished it, have made other arrangements for Spain. There is, however, no indication that he had any doubt as to the forces left there proving adequate for the task of maintaining his interests; and indeed, in spite of Salamanca, they compelled Wellington to make one more retreat into Portugal. It was only the total wreck of the Russian expedition which delivered Spain over to Wellington.

Of the levies made within Napoleon's immediate territories more will be said in the next chapter, as well as of the pressure put upon those not strictly his subjects, who were nevertheless under his control. The contingents to be furnished by the various states of the Confederation of the Rhine were all fixed by the federal pact, if such it can be called. There yet remained, however, more to be

done before all western and central Europe, with the exceptions depending on English action, could be enrolled in one host against the great power of the east.

During the period of Napoleon's ascendency it is more than usually necessary to bear in mind the difference between the real and the apparent policy of states. Austria or Prussia, conscious of being no match for Napoleon, might, and did from time to time, behave as if willing to join in real alliance with him; and foreign states might well be perplexed to judge whether their attitude was sincere or feigned. Every power must needs act according to its calculation of its own interests, and the calculator may be sagacious and far-sighted, or may be hasty and timid. And each power, with the ever-present fear of fresh aggression on the slightest provocation, was almost driven to behave ambiguously, even if its real purpose was decided. It is easy to discern now that both Austria and Prussia, at the bottom of their hearts, cherished as their strongest feeling the desire for revenge on the tyrant, and would gladly seize the first favourable opportunity for taking up arms; but it is also easy to discern that they passed through phases of painful hesitation as to whether the time was come. Until then, not only must they sedulously guard against any show of hostility, but they might find their advantage in entering into friendly relations with Napoleon. Naturally, any such reluctance to venture on antagonism was, as it were, magnified in their outward demeanour, and especially in their dealings with each other. At no time during the period between the Wagram campaign and the invasion of Russia could any independent state on the Continent feel sure of what any other would do. England's attitude was, at any rate in outline, clear and consistent:

she never relaxed her hostility to Napoleon, was always ready to welcome as an ally any continental state that might dare to join her, and always ready to admit, in theory at least, that other states must choose their own time for action. But even about England there was the doubt how long she could hold out against the Continental System, which in fact tried her greatly and was supposed to be more injurious to her than it really was; and there was the further uncertainty how much the British government would be courageous, or skilful, or unselfish enough to do for her allies. And no other government could trust any other even as far as it could trust England. Prussia gave the impression abroad of intense weakness and timidity, Austria of selfishness; Russia had gained much from the Tilsit alliance, and had certainly done nothing since then to inspire confidence in either of her neighbours. The ideal for all three was combination against the common enemy, but that ideal required the ignoring for the time of their individual interests, which were not only separate but more or less conflicting. The chance lost before Austerlitz was not to be regained easily. At bottom, the policy of each of the three, during the critical two years before Napoleon invaded Russia, was sensible and consistent from its own point of view; but, for that very reason, it was more or less concealed from its neighbours, and liable more or less reasonably to arouse their suspicions.

Geographical considerations determined to a very great extent the attitude of all three powers. These, as will appear later, contributed to the Russian resolution to stand strictly on the defensive, quite as much as the desire to put Napoleon formally in the wrong. They were still more important to Austria and Prussia. Austria had her own

interests on the Danube, which were threatened by the conquests Russia seemed to be making from Turkey. But the vital point for both was that they lay geographically between Napoleon's Empire and Russia, and therefore must necessarily bear the brunt of the war if they leagued with Russia against him. Hardenberg and Metternich both came to see that the true interest of Austria and Prussia was to act in concert; but the circumstances of the two powers were far from identical, and therefore each tended to be doubtful whether the other was quite sincere.

Prussia had been under Napoleon's feet ever since Jena. Her fortresses were occupied by his troops, maintained at her expense. She had been made to find most of the supplies for the six months' intermittent campaign which ended at Tilsit. At the peace, when her interests were but lukewarmly defended by the Tzar, she had been deprived of about half her territory, and had been burdened with a vast war indemnity, of which the instalments had only with great difficulty been paid. Her army was limited by the treaty to 42,000 men; her King had felt himself compelled to dismiss his chief minister at Napoleon's bidding. French officers and others talked openly of the coming annihilation of Prussia. Napoleon himself had not hesitated to say to Metternich that on the first offence committed by Prussia he should destroy her; and there is every probability that information to this effect was passed on to Berlin.

King Frederick William III. was not a strong man; he felt acutely his position, but rather with the helpless misery of a confirmed invalid than with the resentment of a nature to which ignominy is worse than death. His people were full of patriotism, but the King was half afraid of a spirit

which seemed too closely allied with revolution. He was hardly conscious of the transformation which the great reforms initiated by Stein were producing in Prussia ; and if he realised the extent to which the astute arrangements of Scharnhorst were renewing the military strength of the nation, he knew also that time was needed for these to take full effect. The sympathies of Hardenberg, now chief minister of Prussia, were patriotic enough. He felt the disgrace of being, even in outward semblance, the slave of Napoleon; but he was too cautious to run a great risk so long as it could be avoided. The King and his minister fully realised that there was no escape from Napoleon's grasp without very effectual assistance ; and that assistance Austria could not give, Russia did not seem willing to give, at any rate for the present. As the prospect of war between France and Russia loomed nearer, they felt that Prussia must needs be involved in it. The probabilities seemed great that Napoleon would be victorious; and if so, he might relax his hold on an ally that had proved valuable, while he certainly would destroy Prussia if she sided against him unsuccessfully. Accordingly at the beginning of 1811 the King of Prussia implored his tyrant to accept his alliance, reiterating that the one wish of his heart was to bind himself irrevocably to France. The spectacle is pathetic, if it is also ignominious, of the heir of the great Frederick humbly begging to be admitted to a position of avowed vassalage like Bavaria and Saxony. Nor is the ignominy lessened by the fact that the offer was insincere. Just at the same time Hardenberg was telling an English agent[1] that if Austria and Russia

[1] G. Mills to Lord Wellesley, the fifth of January, 1811, Record Office, Prussia, 209.

united against Napoleon, Prussia would join them heartily, but that if Austria held aloof, Prussia would have nominally to join with France, but would in that case take care to do no real harm to Russia.

Napoleon was slow to respond to these overtures. He had not yet finally made up his mind for war, and had no wish to precipitate matters, either by concluding an alliance which could be directed against no power but Russia, or by making fresh aggressions on Prussia, and so giving her great neighbour a *casus belli*. At the same time he was very suspicious of Prussia, especially when the government used his own pretext of guarding against an English descent on the coast as an explanation for some military preparations reported to Napoleon. As early as the eleventh of March, 1811, he was giving instructions[1] for siege trains to be organised ready for the simultaneous sieges of Spandau, Neisse, and Colberg, the only fortresses still in Prussian hands. On the thirtieth of April he told his ambassador at Berlin[2] that if Prussia made any movement he should occupy the country; and somewhat later he sent to Davout, commanding the army of Germany, formal orders to be ready at a moment's notice to march on Berlin. These suspicions were not ill-founded: on general grounds it was certain that a power treated as Prussia had been treated would be at heart bitterly hostile. Even Napoleon, with all his tendency to regard all opposition to himself as mere blind folly, could hardly have imagined that Prussia would submit for one moment after it had become reasonably possible to revolt. There is no positive trace of his having had definite information of what was going on—indeed it

[1] Nap. Corr. 17,454.
[2] Nap. Corr. 17,671.

may safely be assumed that if he had he would have overrun Prussia at once; but in fact she was seriously meditating putting all to the venture. Driven wild by uncertainty, the King in the summer turned to Russia, offering to put every available man into the field, and to bear, as was inevitable, the brunt of the war, if secure of effective Russian assistance. This step was naturally shrouded in the closest secrecy, until the result was known; even the English agent[1] was only told in the most general terms, and not by Hardenberg. Many weeks passed without a reply. On the twenty-fifth of September Gneisenau wrote to Harcourt King,[2] the English agent in Vienna, "We wait for an answer to our last communication to the Cabinet of Petersburg with a degree of painful anxiety which those who are acquainted with the wavering and irresolute policy of that Cabinet will have no difficulty in conceiving." These epithets were not exactly applicable, though a Prussian might be pardoned for using them. The Russian prime minister was a partisan of the French alliance, and believed, it is said, that at the worst a quarrel might be averted by giving Napoleon a slice of the conquests which Russia was making from Turkey. The Tzar himself was not yet

[1] G. Mills to Lord Wellesley, the twenty-sixth of August, 1811, R. O. Prussia, 209. "Gneisenau (now in subordinate office) writes me—'I have every hope of, and the utmost confidence in, our success; the means we possess are great indeed, and when displayed (if unexpected obstacles do not present themselves) will not fail to astonish the whole universe. Matters are now arrived at such a pitch that a retrograde step is impossible, and you will hold on my solemn assurance a full guarantee against any future irresolution.'" Gneisenau was far too sanguine about the immediate present, but he was not far wrong in saying that the strength of Prussia, when she did exert it, would astonish the world.

[2] Hon. J. H. King to Lord Wellesley, R. O. Austria, 105.

convinced that war was inevitable, and he had already before his mind the idea of standing strictly on the defensive, which implied doing without allies. It is probable enough that the interval was employed in once more sounding Austria, and that on finding her determined not to commit herself to an alliance, Alexander came to the final resolution that he would make no aggressive movement whatever. This inevitably meant the rejection of the offered Prussian alliance. Why the refusal should have been put in the ironical form of a proposal to occupy Königsberg with 12,000 men if Prussia took up arms, does not appear. Possibly it was honestly meant; the Tzar would go so far in backing Prussia, but no further. But the Prussian government may well be excused for being sore at the reply, and Metternich for having interpreted it as meaning that Russia would very likely not fight when it came to the point.

The Tzar was made fully aware that under these conditions Prussia would take part with France, and that therefore Napoleon would have full control of everything up to the Russian frontier. But the very theory of his defence was to await invasion, and therefore it was of minor consequence whether the enemy's approach was or was not facilitated by Prussia. As events turned out, the Tzar's decision was most fortunate both for himself and for Prussia. Russia achieved a more brilliant success than in all probability she could have gained on the Oder; and Prussia, though grievously despoiled, could rise against Napoleon in 1813 with her fighting population intact.

All this time diplomatic correspondence was kept up with France, partly no doubt in order to lull Napoleon's suspicions. The Emperor complained of the Prussian

armaments, while repeatedly refusing to evacuate Glogau, which by treaty he ought to have done years before; and Hardenberg did not hesitate to affirm that Prussia was arming to support France, if Napoleon would accept her alliance, but also to hint that she would rather perish sword in hand than submit to further disgrace. Napoleon, however, delayed coming to any agreement. The King of Prussia had offered to join Napoleon with 100,000 men, begging in return to be relieved from some part of the intolerable pecuniary burden which was crushing the state, and to have the fortresses restored. He doubtless calculated that the greater his services the larger would be his reward in restoration of territory. This however did not suit Napoleon: he may possibly have been unwilling to see large Prussian forces put into the field, lest they should be turned against him, and with his enormous armaments he had no great need of further troops. On the other hand he attached very great importance to being able to treat Prussian territory as his own for the purposes of the campaign. He therefore proposed that the existing treaty should be maintained, except that he was to retain Glogau, that Prussia should furnish a contingent of 20,000 men, that he should have free passage across Prussia, and that he should have full liberty to make requisitions, payment for which was to be arranged for eventually. Hardenberg stood out for awhile against accepting these conditions, which amounted to complete surrender. In fact it was rather worse for Prussia than positive annexation to France, for Napoleon would not crush his own subjects with all the exactions by which Prussia, nominally a separate state, could be overwhelmed. Napoleon was seeking all the advantages that could accrue to him from the subjugation

of Prussia, and also those derivable from leaving her formally independent. He got his way for the moment, thanks to Hardenberg's self-sacrificing willingness to play a shameful part, and thereby lost his opportunity of stifling the rapidly growing military strength of Prussia, of which no doubt he had hardly a suspicion.

In February, 1812, Napoleon, believing that Russia was better prepared than she in fact was, and might anticipate him by entering Prussia and seizing his vast stores there accumulated, thought it worth while to come to a final arrangement. Sending for the Prussian ambassador, he intimated that the treaty must be signed at once. This was in accordance with his usual practice, of terrifying by threats of instant force and leaving no time for reflection. The ambassador did not dare to take the responsibility of refusing, with Marshal Davout and 200,000 men within a march or two of Berlin. The King was equally afraid to refuse ratification; perhaps Hardenberg consoled himself with the reflection that as practically no treaties bound Napoleon when it was his interest to violate them, it did not much matter what the terms were. One favourable point in the treaty was that the Prussian contingent should be kept together, though otherwise at Napoleon's disposal. It did in fact constitute the larger half of Macdonald's corps, and was destined to form the extreme left of the invading army, though some cavalry was detached and went with Napoleon to Moscow. Thus in the campaign the Prussians played a very unimportant part, suffered but little loss and inflicted no more on the Russians, and were in a position at the end to act with independence when York dared to do so.

This alliance was of course odious to the Prussian people, among whom the ideas of German patriotism had implanted

themselves firmly, and the secret societies had extended their organisation everywhere. The national uprising of the next year was the true expression of Prussian feeling; and no one could have withheld admiration if the government had dared the same thing in 1811 or 1812. Nevertheless it is impossible to blame the King for not encountering so enormous a risk, especially as he must have been utterly dependent on the ally who had shown but little consideration for him at Tilsit. The ignoble policy, selfish, weak, vacillating, which Prussia had pursued from the failure of the first attack on revolutionary France till it met its punishment at Jena, had not yet been fully expiated. The last dregs of the cup of bitterness had still to be drained.

The relations of France with Austria were not so simple as those with Prussia. Much as Austria had suffered by her defeat in successive wars and consequent losses of territory, she was still a great power, the only one left on the Continent besides France and Russia. Her humiliations had been too great ever to be forgotten; the loss of her Adriatic provinces had cut her off from all access to the sea. It was inevitable that she should look for an opportunity of retrieving her position, if possible by revenge on the conqueror. But for the time she was relatively too weak to think of her dignity or her vengeance; the one paramount object was to regain material strength, which in the desperate state of her finances must be a work of time. For this, in order to purchase a period of tranquillity, and some *modicum* of French support, Francis II. lowered himself in his own eyes by marrying his daughter to the upstart Emperor. There are abundant proofs that Metternich, and *à fortiori* his master, regarded the marriage not as a pledge of reconciliation, but as one humiliation

the more, to be endured because of the immediate advantage that it ensured some breathing space to recover from recent disasters. The public expressions of amity probably deceived neither of the contracting parties: Napoleon, however, seems to have thought that he held Austria practically though not formally bound to his side. Metternich had made the marriage of Napoleon with the archduchess the pretext for going to Paris on a special mission, and remained there during some months of 1810, enjoying frequent opportunities of private intercourse with the Emperor, of which the diplomatist made good use. The Russian successes against Turkey were repeatedly the theme of conversations, in which Napoleon tried to frighten Austria into active alliance through fear of Russia acquiring complete control of the lower Danube, or to bribe her with offers of Servia—to be taken, according to Napoleon's usual method of purchasing everything at the expense of others, from his ally the Sultan. Metternich, however, was not to be misled. He marked the growing hostility to Russia in Napoleon's mind, and saw that Austria's policy for all reasons was to remain quiescent. So long as she did so he saw that she would be courted by both parties; and his prescience was soon justified by overtures for alliance coming from Russia in October, 1810, to which no definite answer was returned.

At the beginning of 1811 the policy, to which Austria adhered until the summer of 1813, was practically decided on. On the seventeenth of January Metternich addressed to the Emperor Francis a long report,[1] in which he declared his conviction that war between France and Russia was inevitable, though not imminent, and that Austria alone among powers

[1] Document No. 177 of Metternich's Autobiography, vol. ii. The Emperor's formal approval of the policy sketched out is appended.

might to a certain extent choose her course. Cordial alliance with Russia he regarded as ruinous, if only for the geographical reason that Austria lay nearer to France, and would therefore obviously be the first to suffer from the French arms. Cordial alliance with Napoleon was equally impossible, for it meant definitely breaking with the old order of things, whereas he deemed the moral strength of Austria to lie greatly in representing it. Hence the true policy for Austria was to do anything in her power to stave off the war, and to preserve her own neutrality.

If there had been any opening for mediation Metternich would doubtless have attempted, as he tried to do when the invasion campaign was verging to its end, to assume the part of mediator. This was however impossible, since there was no definite disagreement between France and Russia. The Tzar, in his diplomatic circular calling attention to the annexation of Oldenburg, had carefully abstained from any definite demand. Napoleon had not officially protested against the new financial measures in Russia, though in unofficial ways he had denounced them as hostile to France. Thus Austria could only look on, and let things take their course. So long as Rumantzov remained Chancellor, Metternich considered it impossible to rely on Russia carrying out any resolution, and therefore could not even forecast the future confidently, still less enter into any secret engagements which depended on Russian action. Metternich's mistrust of Rumantzov appears on every occasion, in his public despatches, in his memorials for the Emperor, in his most private correspondence. The interesting series of private letters[1] to his

[1] Vienna Archives. — Schreiben des F. Metternich an Grafen Stackelberg, 1811—1813. They are all in Metternich's own hand, and are perfectly confidential.

friend Count Stackelberg, the Russian ambassador, never mention Rumantzov without expressing or implying a wish to see the conduct of Russian affairs pass into better hands. Nevertheless, unless both Metternich and the Emperor pledged their honour to deliberate lies, they looked forward sooner or later to siding against France.

At what exact date Napoleon began to demand Austrian assistance in the campaign for which he was actively preparing, does not appear. He first asked for 60,000 men, and was liberal in his offers of compensation at the expense of Turkey or Prussia, but this the Austrian government successfully resisted. Further bargaining must have followed, for on the twenty-fourth of November Count Nugent, the secret agent for communication between Austria and England, reported[1] to the British foreign minister a private interview with the Emperor and Metternich in which they defined their attitude very clearly. They could feel no confidence in Russia while the conflict between rival policies was still undecided: if Russia really meant to fight, why did she refuse the recent Prussian offers? until war was certain Austria must stay quiet, making no alliance with England or any other power: hence they were going to make a treaty with France, in the hope to do no harm to Russia, and to have time for renewing the Austrian army: when the time came Austria would turn against France. The most remarkable point about this conversation is that in it all the details as to the Austrian contingent appear as in the treaty signed four months later, including one not included in the treaty but carried out in fact. Neither

[1] Nugent to Wellesley, the twenty-fourth of November, 1811, R. O. Austria, 104.

the Emperor nor Metternich hesitated to tell Nugent that all this was intended to enable them to make their operations null, if Russia acted in the same spirit. Metternich even went so far as to pledge his honour that the Austrian contingent would under no circumstances be increased.

Oncken,[1] who did not obtain access to the Foreign Office Records, attributes the decision to make a qualified alliance with France to the influence of Prince Schwarzenberg, the Austrian ambassador in Paris, who was certainly hostile to Russia and inclined to the French alliance. Schwarzenberg, it is said, having come to Vienna to see the state of affairs for himself, refused to return to Paris unless he were empowered to accept proposals for alliance if made by Napoleon. Thereupon a council was held on the fifth of December, in which Schwarzenberg gained his point, though Metternich, backing up the objections of the finance minister, obtained the limitation of the contingent to be supplied to 30,000 or 40,000 men, instead of the 100,000 proposed by Schwarzenberg. So reported the Prussian ambassador to his own court, saying that he had ascertained all this from an exceptional source and under a pledge of inviolable secrecy. Later on Metternich explained to Count Hardenberg his reasons for abandoning the attitude of neutrality that he had hitherto ostensibly maintained. If we had remained neutral, he said, we could not have armed at all; we should have had to fear risings in Galicia and possibly in Hungary; we should have been exposed to the risk that Napoleon, according to his usual system, would agree with Russia that both should aggrandise themselves at our expense. He professed himself to be staunch in his adherence to the ultimate end, to which he deemed this

[1] Oesterreich und Preussen im Befreiungskriege, ii. 72 *sq.*

the best way, and said he would send Nugent to assure England that, come what might, Austria would remain true.

The obvious explanation of the contradiction between the perfectly clear statement of Austrian policy to England in November, and the vacillations reported by Hardenberg, is that Metternich was in the latter playing a deep game. He had made up his mind comparatively early as to the best policy to adopt, and had induced the Emperor to accept it. Then, seeing that he would get better terms from Napoleon in proportion as he hung back, he concealed his real purpose from every one. He let Schwarzenberg think that the policy of alliance with France was his own, adopted reluctantly by the government. He kept Prussia in the dark, lest from that side his game should be unwittingly disclosed. Napoleon was really outwitted; he assented to an arrangement which Austria desired, as the means of enabling her to take measures which were intended to be ultimately turned against him. Metternich perhaps saw that Napoleon dared not invade Russia unless assured of the friendliness of Austria, placed on his flank in such a position as to threaten his advance most dangerously, and that therefore he might venture to hold out for his own terms. Napoleon's military insight must have told him the same; it was easier and cheaper for the present to accept Austria's terms than to coerce her, as he could do with Prussia.

Austria not only got her own way as to the military convention; she was equally successful on the political side of the bargain. It was Metternich's belief that Napoleon, if victorious, would restore Poland, a step which would be in itself acceptable to Austria, as affording a barrier against Russia, of whom she was always somewhat afraid. This would probably cost her Galicia, but Metternich was

wise enough to see that the Adriatic provinces, of which Austria had been deprived in 1809, were far more valuable to her. By adroitly pressing Napoleon on the subject of Poland, he obtained a guarantee of Galicia, with a proviso that if Austria was willing to surrender the whole or part she should be indemnified in the Illyrian provinces. As this was the only occasion on which Napoleon before his fall ever undertook, even contingently, to surrender territory he had once seized, it affords a fair indication of his anxiety to content Austria.

On the fourteenth of March, 1812, the treaty[1] was signed. The public portion of it merely contained a mutual guarantee of territory, and an undertaking that each would supply an auxiliary force of 24,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry, and 60 guns, in case the other were attacked or menaced. The essence of the treaty lay in the secret articles, the gist of which was (1) that the alliance was against Russia only; (2) that the Austrian contingent was to remain a separate corps under an Austrian general, though acting under Napoleon's orders; (3) that if Poland was re-established, Austrian interests should be secured in the manner already stated. On paper this was a great diplomatic victory for Austria, though Metternich must have felt qualms as to the security for Napoleon carrying out his promise as to Galicia in case of his complete success. Austria was able not only to wage war with limited liability, to use a modern phrase, but to do as much for Russia as for France, and so to keep her own strength unimpaired, while the two giants whom she feared were weakening, perhaps destroying, one another. As Metternich puts it,[2] the

[1] Printed in Fain, i. 116.

[2] Metternich Autob. i. 150.

Austrian attitude was in effect protecting Russia against attack along a very great portion of her frontier.

It was provided in the treaty that the Austrian contingent should be ready to take the field in time to concentrate at Lemberg by the fifteenth of May. This was punctually done, and at the same time other forces were equipped, ready to protect the frontier in Galicia and Transylvania. It had originally been suggested that the Archduke Charles should command the auxiliary corps, but he refused, and the command was given to Schwarzenberg, as personally acceptable to Napoleon.

As soon as the movement of troops began, the treaty was communicated by the Austrian government to the Tzar. The Emperor personally spoke to Stackelberg on the subject, assuring him that Austria did not regard herself as really at war with Russia. Official despatches were also sent to St. Petersburg—a formal one to Rumantzov, a private and confidential one to the Tzar himself. In the latter Metternich frankly put it to the Tzar whether Austria under all the circumstances could have acted otherwise. Lebzeltern, the Austrian envoy, had a private audience of the Tzar, and his report throws a vivid light on the situation, on the fundamental goodwill between the two powers in spite of their nominal hostility, on the element of mistrust arising out of the fact that neither was quite sure of the other's firmness. Referring to the declaration that Austria, while contributing a contingent to the invading army, did not regard herself as a principal in the war, Alexander made very natural inquiries as to what this anomalous attitude meant, prefaced by assurances that he had no wish to inflict the slightest scratch on Austria. "Suppose I am successful at the outset," he

asked the Austrian envoy, "and drive back the invaders, do you expect me to treat your territory as neutral? It would be very unfair that Napoleon should be able to attack me from Austrian soil, and that you should expect me to respect it." He asked further for explicit assurances that the troops in Galicia and Transylvania would not be used against him, pointing out how difficult it would be to resist the pressure Napoleon would apply for reinforcements, either to finish off the war the more speedily if he were victorious, or to avert fresh disaster if he were unsuccessful. Metternich's reply[1] was dated only on the twenty-second of June, when hostilities were on the point of beginning, but he repeated his argument that Austria was only auxiliary in the war, and that her share was strictly limited by the treaty of the fourteenth of March. Pointing out that the Austrian contingent was no longer even on Austrian soil, but formed part of the entire army, he admitted that the Tzar had a perfect right, if successful, to follow Napoleon into Austria, but added that the Emperor could hardly be expected not to defend his own territory from invasion. As to the second question, he offered to give the fullest assurances, in return for a counter declaration from the Tzar, and a promise of inviolable secrecy. The Vienna archives afford no indication that these mutual assurances were ever in fact interchanged, but both sides acted throughout the war as if they had been given, to their common advantage. And Metternich gave further proof of his sincerity by communicating to Count Stackelberg the secret orders given to the corps commanders in Galicia and Transylvania.

[1] The draft of this in Metternich's handwriting, in the form of a report to be laid before the Emperor, indorsed with the Emperor's approval, is in the Vienna archives, together with a copy of the envoy Lebzeltern's report.

The irony of the situation was thus rendered complete. Napoleon was preparing the most enormous host on record, in order to force upon Europe the preposterous system which he had persuaded himself was as good as a law of nature. He could not reach Russia without either destroying Austria and Prussia, or having their co-operation. Prussia because she is helpless to resist, Austria because she calculates that acquiescence will pay her best, agree to contribute their quotas to Napoleon's unwieldy army. Both powers meanwhile hate him with all their hearts, and have an understanding behind his back with one another and also with the nominal enemy.

This understanding was indeed not thorough. Each of the three powers had, and was justified in having, its own special aims and interests, which from the nature of the case did not coincide with the interests of the others. Each to a certain extent mistrusted the others, and plenty of grounds for such mistrust had been afforded by the outward behaviour of all three. Russia, so far as the mind of the Tzar represented Russia, was fully determined on fighting to the death, but the other powers saw in the avowed attitude of the chief minister of Russia, and in her conduct at and after the peace of Tilsit, grave reason to doubt whether the Tzar's resolution, of which they were aware, would be maintained in spite of domestic opposition. They knew also that Russia was ambitious of domination in Europe, and were very doubtful how far Russian preponderance would accord with their own separate interests. As for Prussia, the other two powers had no doubt whatever as to her sentiments, but in view of her ignominious behaviour before the Jena campaign they might well doubt whether her courage would not fail at the critical moment.

Austria had pledged herself very deeply, so far as words went. Metternich had communicated to the Prussian ambassador everything, even to the memorials he had written for the Emperor's eye only; and we now know that he really meant to act accordingly. He sincerely desired to act in concert with Prussia and in hostility to France, but only when it should be reasonably safe to do so. When Russia had irrevocably committed herself to war, he would wish her success, and take care to do her no harm; but he would not run the risk of again paying the costs of failure. Thus it was not wonderful that Count Hardenberg, the Prussian ambassador at Vienna, felt from time to time an uneasy suspicion lest Metternich might be playing false after all. But behind all equivocal behaviour Austria was true to the common cause, which was really her own.

There was yet another power which, though it had no official existence, was still a political reality, capable of rendering great service to Napoleon, and eager to do so, provided that he made the due return. The partition of Poland was not twenty years old, and the sentiment of Polish nationality was probably more powerful than in the later days of Polish independence. It may be doubted whether the supposed sympathy of France for Poland was ever more than self-interest, with a certain varnish of sentiment. Poland had been in the past a frequent enemy of powers which were on the whole antagonistic to France: she was Catholic, while her two real enemies were Greek and Protestant; she had been finally partitioned when all western Europe was intent on the French Revolution, and the war kindled by it. Poland might prove a convenient weapon wherewith to strike any or all of the great continental powers that from time to time took arms against

France. Hence there were plenty of motives tending to dispose the French nation favourably towards Poland, though there is not a trace of any deep or earnest feeling, of any disposition to make sacrifices for her benefit. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the Poles in general expected great things of France, and were strong partisans of the French cause in Europe. They had fought by thousands in the French ranks, chiefly perhaps in order to combat France's enemies, who were also the oppressors of Poland. They had specially attached themselves to Napoleon, waiting for the day when the apparently irresistible conqueror would find himself in a position to restore Polish independence, of which he professed himself a zealous partisan. When Prussia had been overthrown at Jena, and the victor passed on to combat Russia on what had within a few years been Polish soil, the whole nation believed that the golden hour was come.

Napoleon's treatment of the Poles was, like all his conduct, actuated by purely selfish motives, but it is easy to blame it too severely. He most undoubtedly led them to expect national restoration at his hands, and obtained from them much willing and valuable service in return for a hope which proved delusive. But it is too much to say that he meant throughout to swindle them. He probably felt a certain sympathy with the Poles, and would have had pleasure in playing the card of Polish independence if it had suited his game; but it never entered his mind to run any risks for their sake. The Poles, like every one else, were instruments to be used for his purposes, not friends who had a claim on him. Accordingly when he found the Tzar after Friedland disposed for peace on terms otherwise satisfactory, he made no scruple about disappointing the

expectations of Poland. Renewal of the war, for the avowed purpose of tearing from Russia all her Polish provinces, would have been challenging to mortal combat a power which he knew to be both formidable and tenacious. It is true that nearly four years later, in his famous letter to Alexander,[1] he asserted that he could have re-established Poland after the battle of Friedland, and again in 1810, using these assertions as proofs that he never desired it. But both statements were violent exaggerations, though hardly absolute falsehoods. He had never had the power to restore Poland without a serious struggle, and he had certainly contemplated it, though he had never made up his mind to pay the price. He had in fact taken at Tilsit the preliminary step: he had revived a fragmentary phantom of Poland, in the shape of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. He had done it in the way most convenient to his own personal interests, but nevertheless it was a beginning. The Poles at any rate never lost their faith in Napoleon. The Tzar's friend, Prince Adam Czartoryski, did his best to persuade his countrymen to accept the Russian scheme of a restoration of the Polish kingdom, with a separate constitution, provided the Tzar was acknowledged as King of it, but he could obtain no support. They remained steadfast in their reliance on France, and were blind to the fact that the new yoke was heavier than the old.

Napoleon was fully aware that the Polish cry might be made very useful in case of war with Russia. As soon as he had positively decided on it, he withdrew all Polish troops from Spain, and included them in the Grand Army. He took care by his secret agreement with Austria to give

[1] Nap. Corr. 17.395.

himself a free hand about Galicia. Whether he believed in the genuineness of Polish patriotism may be doubted, for he was little capable of understanding any motive power but force. The semblance of it, however, would serve his turn equally well: it would bring more soldiers to his standard, and it might embarrass his enemies. But it was far more important in his estimation to squeeze out of the country everything that it could supply for his military needs.

When he was actually on his way to the army, Napoleon took Poland into his own hands. He sent to Warsaw Dufour de Pradt, Archbishop of Malines, nominally as his ambassador to the Grand Duchy, practically to direct the government of it, and to make the Poles take steps towards asserting their own independence. The elaborate instructions which he wrote for the Archbishop[1] are worth careful reading. They show beyond all doubt that at this time at least, whatever may have been the case earlier, he was bent on making a cat's paw of Poland, unless decisive success should enable him to carve the map of Europe afresh. The King of Saxony has just placed the whole royal authority in the hands of the council of ministers: its first duty is to employ all the resources of the country for the use of the army: the ambassador's first business is to secure that this is done. Next come the steps to be taken for restoring Poland. The council must call a Diet, in a proclamation so drawn as to excite in the highest degree public attention and curiosity. Then the Diet must receive a petition from eight or ten of the chief persons in Russian Poland, including Prince Adam Czartoryski! Then the Diet must appoint a committee which will make a long

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,734.

report on the wrongs of Poland directed altogether against Russia, and propose a decree declaring Poland re-established. The first act of the new assembly will be to summon all Poles to quit the Russian service. The ambassador is not to take an ostensible part, but is to direct the whole. "Lorsque la confédération sera formée, elle enverra une députation à l'Empereur pour lui présenter l'acte de confédération et lui demander sa protection. L'Empereur répondra aux députés en louant les sentiments qui animent les Polonais. Elle leur dira que ce n'est qu'à leur zèle, qu'à leurs efforts, à leur patriotisme, qu'ils peuvent devoir la renaissance de la patrie." It is impossible to read this minute receipt for a Polish revolution made to order, without recognising that the man who concocted it had no belief in honest patriotic feelings, and no real intention to strike a blow for Poland. What he wanted was to serve his own ends to the utmost by the machinery of patriotic agitation; when the utmost had been got, but not till then, he was to have his protection implored, and then it would not matter if his reply damped their zeal.

It is perfectly possible that in case of complete victory over Russia he would have made a kingdom of Poland for one of his satellites, and it is known that Murat hoped for it. He always took pleasure in destroying and recasting kingdoms, as every such step made his own crown seem less offensively new. A month or so earlier Bernadotte told the English representative[1] in Sweden that he had just received verbal offers from Napoleon as to the price he was prepared to pay for the alliance of Sweden, and the scheme involved the political reconstruction of all northern and eastern Europe. Such proposals need not be taken too seriously,

[1] Thornton to Castlereagh, the third of May, 1812, R. O. Sweden, 217.

the more so as they were made verbally, so that they might be easily disowned: but they serve to confirm the impression that Napoleon was quite ready to re-establish Poland as soon as he saw that it would pay. As the tide turned against him, the opportunity passed away, and the unfortunate Poles found that they had not only given their blood for nothing, but that they had lost the one favourable chance of making good terms with the Tzar.

The Archbishop of Malines was not a very happy choice for the rather ignominious task of at once fleecing and cajoling the Poles. He unfortunately knew Napoleon too well. In the introduction to the history of his mission he hits off one side of his character, perhaps the most important side, to a nicety. Napoleon, he says, "n'a jamais vu dans les hommes que des projectiles faits pour être lancés contre ses ennemis." No wonder that the devoted Ménéval denounces De Pradt's book as a monument of ingratitude and cowardice. He had too high an opinion of himself to be merely the supple and unscrupulous tool. Though he obeyed his instructions, he did not succeed in rousing Polish enthusiasm to fever heat. The old Polish provinces held by Russia remained quiescent, suffering probably more from the French who posed as their deliverers than from the Russians. Even in Lithuania, through which Napoleon himself passed, there was no zeal for his cause, though the people seemed to welcome him. Another man in De Pradt's place might possibly have achieved more, though there is no solid ground for thinking so. At any rate Napoleon's invective against him, as one of the chief causes of his overthrow, may be classed with the rest of the vast accumulation of St. Helena mendacity.

CHAPTER III.

THE GRAND ARMY.

The Grand Army with which Napoleon invaded Russia was the largest and the most motley host that had ever obeyed a single commander, at any rate since another despot tried in vain to overwhelm Greece. In it were assembled soldiers from every country of continental Europe west of the Adriatic, besides the contingents of Austria and Prussia, which came from regions mainly east of that line. The frontiers of what was officially France had been shifted so often since the first successes of the Revolution, that it is obviously impossible to ascertain the proportion between the troops really French in race and language and those supplied from the annexed provinces. A general estimate, based on the comparison of the relative extent and population of genuine and Napoleonic France, can only give very vague results. And it will take no account of the large number of individuals from all quarters, prisoners of war and the like, whom Napoleon enrolled in his own regiments.

Napoleon's ordinary organisation reckoned on about 800 men in the ranks of each battalion, though naturally all were not exactly filled, and the so-called French battalions were occasionally above, while the foreigners tended to fall slightly below, this number. For purposes of calculation, however, the battalions may be considered to

be all equal without serious error. On this assumption the proportion of foreigners to nominal French among the infantry who entered Russia at the outset was about seven to six. In the cavalry the ratio was reversed, and in the artillery, etc., there was a still larger proportion of French. Of the foreigners two-fifths were Germans, one-fifth Italians, the remainder mostly Poles. The residue comprised twelve battalions of Swiss, four of Spaniards, four of Portuguese, besides Croats and Illyrians.[1] And as the separate contingents of Prussia and Austria, who in form at least were merely Napoleon's allies, have been left out of this calculation, it will be seen that the numbers contributed by France proper to the Emperor's great undertaking were not overwhelming. The sacrifices of France at this moment were very largely being made in Spain, where Napoleon was maintaining armies, amounting to more than half his Russian host, in which the proportion of actual French was extremely high. The contingents to be provided by Napoleon's German vassals were fixed by the articles of the Confederation of the Rhine, though they were entirely at his disposal when once in the field. In the so-called kingdom of Italy he could of course make what levies he pleased, and the forces supplied must have made a ruinous demand on the resources of what, after all, was but a fraction of geographical Italy. Of Switzerland he complained bitterly that recruiting was so slack, as if the Swiss

[1] I have derived these calculations from the tables of the Russian Buturlin, whose figures agree very closely with those given by Chambray, the most precise of the French eye-witnesses. Chambray however does not descend to battalions; he gives only regiments, and as regiments did not always contain the same number of battalions, it furnishes a nearer approach to absolute accuracy to use the latter as the unit.

could on any conceivable ground suppose that their interests were furthered by his attack on Russia; but he managed to extract some 10,000 men from the country. The Portuguese were to all intents and purposes kidnapped men: many of them had been drafted away in 1808 when Junot forcibly occupied the country, and had been kept in military bondage ever since; others were prisoners of war, who had enlisted to escape from captivity. The Poles alone served willingly: they were the subjects of his vassal, and therefore bound to furnish a contingent; but they did in fact supply what for the resources of the Duchy of Warsaw must be deemed an enormous force.

The question naturally suggests itself how a vast army, of such heterogeneous materials, was kept effectively together. In the first place all the corps commanders except Poniatowski, and a large proportion of the superior officers generally, were Frenchmen, used to Napoleon's methods, and more or less devoted to him. With the solitary exception of the Austrian corps, which was by treaty to be kept separate, all portions of the whole were therefore directed by men of whose zeal there was no doubt. The difficulty of language was not really felt, for the regimental officers were in general the countrymen of the privates; and after all there is not much which the common soldier needs to understand even now, and there was less in the days before rifles. French soldiers were no longer the patriotic enthusiasts of 1793; Napoleon's watchword for them was not duty, but glory. The veterans were undoubtedly fascinated by the Emperor; they reckoned with well-founded confidence on his leading them to victory, and felt a fierce pleasure in proving their superiority in the field, regardless of the fact that the glory was for him, the suffering for themselves.

This feeling was by no means general in France, if indeed it existed outside the army; year by year the number of refractory conscripts rose, the measures for driving them into the ranks grew more stringent and more costly. Nevertheless the young soldiers soon learned the temper of their comrades: they obeyed orders, and were expended without a murmur.

To the French there might be imaginably some satisfaction in the thought that their country was dominating Europe, though those who know the private soldier the best will probably be inclined to lay least stress on this. Certainly no such idea could occur to the Germans, whom the fears or the selfishness of their rulers sent to fight under the banner of the oppressor of Germany, nor to Swiss or Spaniards or Neapolitans. It would be difficult to point out any evidence, however, that Napoleon's army was weakened during the campaign by any lack of zeal. There was a large amount of straggling, which inevitably resulted from the inveterate practice, often a virtual necessity, of marauding in search of supplies; but there is no sign of the Russian attempt to appeal to the patriotic feelings of the Germans having met with any success. The force of discipline is notoriously great; effectively administered, it makes men obey the word of command automatically, and instils the idea that disobedience is the one unpardonable crime. More potent perhaps even than discipline is the *vis inertiæ*. If a man's mental horizon is so narrow that he practically does not think, he goes forward in the groove in which he has been set moving, unconcernedly if not contentedly, like a particle obeying the first law of motion. And the classes from which private soldiers were drawn were at the beginning of this century

probably more ignorant, certainly much more limited in their knowledge of what was going on in the world, than in these days of cheap newspapers. The soldiers who took Napoleon's pay were probably as well off materially as if they had stayed at home; they ran more risks, but they had some excitement, and those among them who had sufficient intelligence could always dream of promotion. The failure of Napoleon's enterprise was not due to any reluctance on the part of the rank and file of his army.

There was, however, considerable reluctance among his chief officers. It is certain that some of the marshals were weary of war, and desirous of time quietly to enjoy the wealth wherewith Napoleon had lavishly rewarded their past services.[1] It would however be unfair to suppose that this warped their judgment, except so far as it gave an additional motive for dislike to a policy of rash adventure. The invasion of Russia must necessarily be a gigantic undertaking, involving unknown difficulties, and there seemed to all eyes except Napoleon's own, no adequate motive for risking disaster, besides the certain sacrifice of vast numbers of lives. When once the die was cast they served, as thorough soldiers might be expected to do, just as vigorously as if they had believed in the necessity of the war. While the issue was still undecided, more than one attempted to open the Emperor's eyes to the enormous risk he would run in case of any check in Russia. Germany, he was assured, would rise as one man, if there seemed reasonable hope of success. Davout, who from his head-quarters at Hamburg commanded the so-called army of Germany, Rapp the governor of Dantzic, even the feeble and pleasure-loving King Jerome—all told the same tale.

[1] See for instance an anecdote in Rapp's Memoirs, chap. 23.

Whatever the princes might say or do, the people were everywhere hostile. Perhaps the liveliest illustration of the general feeling is given by De Pradt, who tells how the Saxon ambassador to Napoleon said, "the French have three partisans in Saxony, the King, my wife and myself, and it is the same all over Germany."[1] Napoleon, however, turned a deaf ear to all warning. In a letter[2] to Davout, of the second of December, 1811, he reprimands the marshal for sending on Rapp's rubbish, and tells him to bid Rapp mind his own business. "There is no parallel," he says, such as Davout had suggested, "between Spain and Germany. Spain would have been reduced long ago, but for 60,000 English [Wellington would have been thankful to command two-thirds of that total], for her thousand leagues of coast, and for the loan she has had from America, for England has no money to lend! Mais comme en Allemagne il n'y a pas d'Amérique, ni la mer, ni une immense quantité de places fortes et 60,000 Anglais, il n'y a rien à craindre, l'Allemand fût-il même aussi oisif, aussi fainéant, aussi assassin, aussi superstitieux, autant livré aux moines que l'est le peuple d'Espagne. There is nothing to fear from a cool and reasonable people like the Germans; if there was a movement, it would be for us and against the small princes." How utterly Napoleon misjudged the situation, if this letter really expressed his sentiments, the events of 1813 were destined to show. It is true that there was no love for the small princes, but the main reason for this was that they were regarded as traitors to Germany. It is true that the Germans were cool and reasonable, but these qualities are not necessarily

[1] Hist. del' ambassade, etc., 69.
[2] Nap. Corr. 18,300.

accompanied by willingness to bear a foreign yoke, and they make more formidable enemies than idleness or superstition. Nevertheless Napoleon's practical conclusion, that there was nothing to fear from the Germans during the Russian war, in which he did not mean to fail, was justified by the event—partly, perhaps, because of German prudence, but very largely for a reason which he did not express to Davout, but which he could hardly have failed to see. Germany was unlike Spain in that it was not cut up by mountain chains, in that it had no great amount of thinly-peopled and almost barren soil, in that it was thickly filled with an industrious population. These physical features of Spain made Wellington's herculean task a possible one; in a country like Germany his army could have been eaten alive, so to speak, by Napoleon's myriads.

Whether Napoleon's judgment was thrown off its balance by an overweening estimate of his own strength, whether he really was possessed by the idea that inevitable fate impelled him, can only be conjectured. Through whatever motives, he persisted in his resolution to make war, while protesting loudly his desire to maintain peace. The preparations were on an unprecedented scale, both as to the numbers of the army, and as to the elaborateness with which all supplies and other accessories were provided. When a purely military question was before him, Napoleon's genius was not at fault. He realised that in Russia he could not follow the method of making war support war, which he had inherited from the first revolutionary armies, and had developed into a system that made his armies of occupation as exhausting as a plague of locusts. The army itself was organised with extreme care; enormous means

of transport were accumulated, including a quantity of ox-waggons, lest there should not be horses enough.

Much care was taken to divert what may be called the heavy goods traffic—the carriage of the reserves of food, ammunition, clothing, forage—as much as possible from the roads on which the soldiers must march, by utilising the coast navigation. Fezensac, who was Berthier's aide-de-camp in the first part of the campaign, and therefore had good opportunities for knowing, even says that the fact that Vilna was accessible by water, up the Wilia from the Niemen, was a main reason why Napoleon established his chief depôts there.

Bakers and other artisans were enlisted in large numbers. Among the earliest additions to an ordinary army staff was a body of secret police, including spies to serve not against the enemy but among his possibly treacherous allies.[1] A little later he included in detailed instructions for the administration of the army, an order that there should be only one post for each corps; or if it should prove necessary to give more to the French, on no account were the allies to be allowed more than one. Correspondence from the seat of war, except what he pleased to send in bulletins, was very far from his taste;[2] one of his first acts on joining the Grand Army was to order that no minister or officer of his allies should on any pretext be allowed to come within twenty leagues of head-quarters. Nor was he less particular about food supplies; as he observed to Davout in one letter,[3] if his plans brought

[1] Maret was ordered to organise this as early as November, 1811: Nap. Corr. 18,350.

[2] Napoleon to Berthier, the third of June, 1812: not in Nap. Corr., but printed in Chambray, iii. 363.

[3] Nap. Corr. 18,725.

together 400,000 men in one locality, it was obvious that nothing could be got from the country. He ransacked Europe for his needs, and, transport being slow, took time by the forelock. On the last day of 1811, five months at least before he had any purpose that hostilities should begin, he ordered inquiries to be made whether wine could not be sent to Warsaw from Hungary, and corn brandy from Moldavia, then occupied by a Russian army at war with the Porte. He even went the length of proposing[1] that wine and brandy should be sent by sea from France to Dantzic under English licences! It does not appear, however, that this ingenious scheme was carried out.

Napoleon has been blamed by nearly all writers on the campaign for allowing an endless multitude of carriages, and an unnecessary number of women and other non-combatants, to accompany the army. He himself set an example which officers of all ranks were only too ready to follow. His own personal attendants were very numerous, and he had with the head-quarters of every corps six or seven horses, with a camp bed, spare clothes, etc., for his use whenever he happened to visit that corps.[2] Berthier, the chief of the staff, had eight or ten aides-de-camp, and a number of clerks. The general staff comprised a great number of officers of all ranks, commanded by General Monthyon. The administration of the army employed so many persons that when Berthier inspected them during the halt at Vilna they looked from a little distance like troops in order of battle.[3] Such a vast mass could only move slowly and with difficulty: consequently we find Napoleon

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,325.
[2] Ménéval, iii. 44.
[3] Fezensac, 210.

in the campaign habitually moving with a handful of officers, whom in his correspondence he denominates *le petit quartier-général*. The entire head-quarters, needing as much time and space for moving as an army corps, and giving much more trouble to provide for, might with advantage have been left behind at Vilna, if not west of the Niemen. In that case every officer would not have considered himself entitled to at least one carriage, the delays and waste would have been diminished, possibly even the ultimate disaster might have been less overwhelming. Napoleon doubtless felt on behalf of the whole army what every officer more or less felt on his own account, the fear lest in an unknown country everything should fail which was not carried with the army. Without enormous supplies, in other words enormous encumbrances, the expedition could not be made at all; on the other hand they were an incessant source of delay and trouble. The difficulty was first to hit on the golden mean between too much and too little, and in this it is probable that Napoleon erred on the side of excess. The second difficulty was to keep in thorough working order the machinery for employing all these *impedimenta*, and in this, as the whole campaign shows, Napoleon or those under him failed egregiously.

With regard to the presence of women with the army, it is difficult to speak with precision. No properly disciplined army would admit the presence of any, though exception must be made for the French practice of having *cantinières* to all regiments, some of whom served through the campaign with a courage and endurance rivalling the most veteran soldiers. None of the accounts mention any other women in the advance; all contain many references to them in the retreat. The memoirs refer to many officers,

or soldiers, having taken mistresses at Moscow, and carrying them away when the city was evacuated. On the other hand Fezensac, for instance, tells an anecdote of an Italian lady who had accompanied her husband, an officer of the 4th corps, from first to last; and in other memoirs it is implied, if not directly asserted, that there were plenty of such cases. Napoleon's own conduct in other campaigns was notorious enough, though no reasonably attested stories can be cited against him in reference to the Russian expedition; nor was the standard of morality among French officers high, apart from any question of the Emperor's example. On one occasion at least Napoleon issued a very peremptory order on the subject. A letter quoted by Chambray, though not in Napoleon's Correspondence, directs that the wife of General Hogendorp, governor of Lithuania, is to be sent back into Germany, though it is hard to see why she should not have been allowed to stay quietly in Vilna. Whether this was an exceptional case, or in pursuance of a general intention that there should be no women with the army, does not appear. There is no trace of any other orders on the subject; and the probable inference is that Napoleon contented himself with giving general instructions, and that in this respect, as in many others, they were very imperfectly carried out.

With respect to the whole question of the encumbrances which impeded the campaign, it is fair to remember that the original scheme contemplated merely the occupation of the Polish provinces of Russia, with the probability of having to keep military possession of them for a certain time, until Russia gave way. Encumbrances which were entirely out of place for a campaign involving a long and laborious march, might not be so unreasonable if the

Emperor was not going beyond Smolensk, possibly not beyond Vilna.

As to the total numbers of Napoleon's enormous host, it is obviously impossible to arrive at minute accuracy, but easy to give a substantially correct account. Many eye-witnesses have written narratives of the expedition: all give the numbers more or less fully, and with no serious discrepancy as to the totals, though they differ infinitely in detail. Chambray, who is the most scrupulously precise in saying what he means, states that his numbers, derived from the returns actually furnished to Napoleon, are those of the men *present under arms* on the day on which each corps began to cross the Russian frontier. Other accounts might obviously bring out different results without being less trustworthy. One might include the very few (at the beginning) not actually present under arms on that day; another might go by the field states of the same day for all corps. Some reckon the rank and file with the regimental officers, and leave out the staff. More than one, while carefully enumerating the infantry and cavalry, make no mention of artillery. Some apparently reckon by hundreds or tens, and do not add in the units. Thus there is ample room for slight variation, without imputing untrustworthiness to any, though conversely it is impossible, in the absence of precise statements such as Chambray makes, to assert positively that none of the writers are inaccurate. Considering the vast numbers involved, and the many possibilities of difference, of which only some have been mentioned, it is a remarkable proof of general *bona fides*, that while these discrepancies occur, the maximum of variation is not above five per cent.

Chambray, whose carefulness and impartiality have never been questioned, may best be taken as a standard

authority for the figures. The following statement is derived from his tables, altered in arrangement for the convenience of printing, but identical in every figure: and to his totals must be added, if we desire a complete view of all the forces engaged directly or indirectly in the campaign, the not inconsiderable bodies of troops left in garrison at Dantzic, Königsberg, and other places.

NUMBERS ON ENTERING RUSSIA AT MIDSUMMER.

Corps.	Infantry.	Cavalry.	Horses.
Staff . . .	3,075	908	1,748
Guard . . .	41,094	6,279	13,322
1st	68,627	3,424	11,417
2nd	34,299	2,840	7,331
3rd	35,755	3,587	8,039
4th	42,430	2,368	10,057
5th	32,159	4,152	9,438
6th	23,228	1,906	3,699
7th	15,003	2,186	5,582
8th	15,885	2,050	3,477
10th	30,023	2,474	6,285
1st Cavalry . .	——	12,077	13,014
2nd ,, . .	——	10,436	11,125
3rd ,, . .	——	9,676	10,451
4th ,, . .	——	7,994	8,766
Austrians . . .	26,830	7,318	13,126
Artillery Park, Engineers, &c. . .	21,526	——	18,265
	409,934	79,675	155,333

N.B.—Soldiers of the corps artillery are reckoned with the infantry or cavalry, as the case may be.

	Infantry.	Cavalry.	Horses.
Previous totals . .	409,934	79,675	155,333
To these are to be added:—			
9th Corps — entered in September . . .	31,663	1,904	4,081
Divisions of Loison and Durutte — entered in November . . .	26,882	——	488
Troops that joined in detachments, including new levies in Lithuania, about	65,000	15,000	20,000
	123,545	16,904	24,569
Grand total . .	533,479	96,579	179,902

Total number of field guns, 1,242.

COMPOSITION OF FRENCH ARMY AT THE BEGINNING.

Corps Commanders.	Generals of Division.	Nationality.
Guard, Old . .	Marshal Lefebvre	French.
	D. of Dantzic .	,,
Guard, Young .	Delaborde . .	,,
M$^{l.}$ Mortier, .	Roguet . . .	,,
D. of Treviso .	Claparède . .	Poles.
Guard, Cavalry .	M$^{l.}$ Bessières, D. of Istria.	
Guard, Artillery .	Sorbier.	

Corps Commanders.	Generals of Division.	Nationality.
1st Corps . .	Morand . .	French (1 regt.
M^l. Davout,		Baden).
P. of Eckmühl.	Friant. . .	French (1 regt.
		Spanish).
	Gudin . . .	French.
	Dessaix . .	,,
	Compans . .	Mecklenburgers.
2nd Corps . .	Legrand . .	French (1 regt.
M^l. Oudinot,		Portuguese).
D. of Reggio .	Verdier . .	French.
	Merle . . .	Swiss and Croats.
3rd Corps . .	Lèdru . . .	French (1 regt.
M^l. Ney,		Portuguese).
D. of Elchingen.	Razout . .	French (1 regt.
		Illyrian, 1 regt.
		Portuguese).
	Marchand . .	Wurtembergers.
4th Corps . .	Lecchi . . .	Italian Guard.
Eugene Beau-	Delzons . .	French (1 regt.
harnais, Vice-		Croats).
roy of Italy.	Broussier . .	French (1 regt.
		Spanish).
	Pino . . .	Italians.
5th Corps . .	Zayonchek . .	Poles.
P. Poniatowski .	Dombrowski .	,,
	Kaminiecki . .	,,
6th Corps . .	Deroy . . .	Bavarians.
St. Cyr . .	Wrede . . .	,,
7th Corps . .	Lecoq . . .	Saxons.
Reynier . .	Defunck . .	,,
8th Corps[1] . .	Tharreau . .	Westphalians.
Jerome Bonaparte.	Ochs . . .	,,

[1] After Jerome quitted the army, the 8th corps was given to M^l. Junot, D. of Abrantes.

Corps Commanders.	Generals of Division.	Nationality.
9th Corps . .	Partouneaux .	French.
M^l. Victor, .	Dändels . .	Berg and Baden.
D. of Belluno .	Girard . .	Poles and Germans.
10th Corps . .	Grandjean . .	Poles, Bavarians and Westphalians.
M^l. Macdonald, D. of Taranto.		
	Grawert . .	Prussians.

Cavalry Reserves, commanded by Murat, K. of Naples.

1st Corps . . Nansouty.	Bruyère (light) .	Poles and Prussians.
	St.Germain(heavy)	French.
	Valence (heavy) .	,,
2nd Corps . . Montbrun.	Sebastiani (light) .	Poles, Prussians, Wurtembergers.
	Wattier (heavy) .	French.
	Defrance (heavy) .	,,
3rd Corps . . Grouchy.	Chastel (light) .	Bavarians and Saxons.
	Doumerc (heavy) .	French.
	De la Houssaye (heavy) . .	,,
4th Corps . . Latour-Maubourg.	Rosinski (light) .	Poles.
	Lorge (heavy) .	Saxons, Poles, Westphalians.

Austrians . . P. Schwarzenberg.	Trautenberg. .	Austrians.
	Bianchi . .	,,
	Siegenthal . .	,,
	Frimont . .	,,

CHIEF MEMBERS OF NAPOLEON'S STAFF.

M[l] Berthier, P. of Neuchatel, chief of the staff.
Gen. Lebrun, D. of Piacenza, aide-de-camp.
— Mouton, C. of Lobau, ,,
— Durosnel, ,,
— Hogendorp, ,,
— Rapp, ,,
— Monthyon, commanding general staff.
— Lariboissière, ,, artillery.
— Chasseloup, ,, engineers.
— Eblé, ,, bridge trains.
Ct. Daru, Secretary of State.
Gen. Caulaincourt, D. of Vicenza, Grand Equerry.
— Duroc, D. of Friuli, Grand Marshal.
Baron Ménéval, private secretary.
—— Fain, ,,
Gen. Jomini, historiographer.

The huge mass was, of course, divided into many corps, under the best generals that Napoleon could command. The only marshal of the Empire who had won a great reputation at the head of armies before Napoleon became master of France was Massena. He had recently gone into retirement, with health injured and fame dimmed by the greatest failure of his life, the Torres Vedras campaign. Of the rest only four, perhaps only two, had great aptitude for chief command, whatever their value as lieutenants. Lannes was dead, Suchet and Soult were in Spain; Davout alone was available. Most of the others were exactly the men best suited to work efficiently under a master like Napoleon, who directed everything himself, and therefore wanted subordinates who were afraid of

nothing, and would obey orders intelligently. He suffered repeatedly because he had trained his marshals to be thought for too much, and therefore left them lacking in experience of acting independently; but while they were under his control they were admirable. No commander-in-chief could have found a better lieutenant than Ney; and Oudinot, Macdonald, Bessières, Junot were little inferior. Nor was there any lack of excellent generals of division, such as Gudin, Delzons, Montbrun. Finally Berthier, who had served Napoleon as chief of the staff ever since 1796, was exactly the man for that very difficult post, though unfitted to command in chief.

Napoleon has been accused of having subordinated the military efficiency of his army to his own personal vanity, in that he placed members of his own family in highly important posts, as if their relationship to him clothed them with powers as well as rank above ordinary humanity. That he was guilty of analogous folly is beyond doubt: it is difficult to believe how a man of Napoleon's abilities should also have been so childishly vain as to insist on giving his own baptismal name to his stepson, to his brothers, even to his brother-in-law. But the accusation hardly holds good in relation to the Russian war. Murat, with all his weaknesses, was a first-rate cavalry officer, and was most properly given the supreme command of the reserve cavalry divisions. Eugene Beauharnais, as Viceroy, was the natural chief for the contingent raised in the kingdom of Italy, and he had already served a creditable apprenticeship to high command. The same would have applied to Jerome, so long as he merely commanded the corps composed of his own Westphalian troops. It was a more dubious act when Napoleon, wishing

on his entrance into Russia to make his main army work in two masses, gave to his brother the supreme control over the smaller of the two. As will be seen later, Jerome bungled his task, not altogether by his own fault, and had to be replaced. It would certainly never have been entrusted to him had he not been the Emperor's brother, and therefore the argument from the result condemns the choice. Nevertheless it is not clear that Napoleon was wrong in his original selection. It avoided any difficulty through jealousy between the marshals, a fruitful source of trouble in Spain; nor was there any one among them conspicuously fitted for the post, except Davout, who was occupied with the command of his own huge corps, already well accustomed to his leadership. Jerome's failure, such as it was, resulted greatly from the inherent difficulty of working operations on the gigantic scale attempted by Napoleon, under the conditions then applicable.

In every kind of undertaking the complication of the machinery requisite for carrying it on tends to increase with the scale of the undertaking itself; there is likely to be a larger amount of friction to be overcome. Though this can in most cases be readily done by a proper expenditure of care and money, yet on the whole the machinery becomes relatively more important, and harder to keep in perfect working order. Matters of peaceful administration, commercial enterprises, derive advantages from being worked on a great scale which more than compensate for these drawbacks. So may a military expedition, if its size enables it to overcome all opposition without serious fighting. But otherwise the movement of a large army affords greater opportunities than perhaps any other kind of undertaking for breaking down through its own weight.

An army is a highly complicated machine to keep going: all its component parts must move in concert, and in obedience to orders from head-quarters, where alone the scheme of combined action can be worked out. No part can move without supplies, for the transport of which direction is needed as thorough as for the march of soldiers, and even more difficult to accomplish successfully over inadequate roads. Failure anywhere to complete the prescribed task punctually involves delay to the whole machine, for, at any rate in presence of the enemy, isolated movements are dangerous—proper co-operation is essential to the safety of all. Every competent general allows a margin for delays arising through accident, which must be numerous, if slight, when every taking of a wrong turning by a messenger, every bit of bad road, every sudden storm, contributes its quota of hindrance. And since all these casualties, which occur, or may occur, in each section of the army, impede not that section only, but the whole; since also some of them from the nature of the case grow worse with repetition (for instance, a muddy ford is a greater obstacle to the second battalion that crosses it than to the first, and enormously greater to the tenth), it is obvious that if you double the size of a force you more than double the occasions of delay.

The very scale of Napoleon's gigantic preparations was therefore in itself an impediment to his success. An invasion by half a million of men is a very difficult undertaking even to-day, with railways to expedite transport, and with field telegraphs to issue instantaneous orders and convey instantaneous information. In 1812 it was a virtual impossibility that such a task could be carried through on the scale on which it was begun. Then every

order and every report had to be sent, perhaps many miles, by mounted messengers; and good as Napoleon's organisation was, casualties were inevitable among them, every one of which might affect the whole army seriously, and must affect it a little. Nothing had ever been seen, at any rate in civilised warfare, like an invading army of half a million directed by a single chief. Probably the largest operation ever previously attempted was the march upon Ulm in 1805, and it is possible that his brilliant success on that occasion tended to make Napoleon believe that to work two or three times the number would present no greater difficulty, if the previous preparation was adequate. The circumstances, however, were really very different. The various corps converged on Ulm from different points, spread from Hamburg to Cherbourg; they marched by well-known roads, through populous and friendly, or at least not actively hostile, country. The invasion of Russia was to be a march through hostile territory, thinly populated, scantily cultivated, where roads were few and bad, besides being imperfectly known to the invaders. Napoleon was better fitted for the attempt than any other man could have been: he possessed the military qualities most important, thorough mastery of detail and great powers of combination, and he held absolute authority over the whole mass. Yet even he could achieve nothing proportional to his preparations. It is proverbially easy to be wise after the event; it is equally easy to demonstrate on paper that such and such results must needs follow from a miscalculation; but those who do this tend to forget that the enemy may be making analogous errors, and that mistakes on both sides tend to neutralise each other. The difficulty of making so vast a military machine work was

only one side of the general rashness which characterised the whole adventure.

Napoleon had taken very special pains to minimise one source of serious trouble—that arising from inadequate knowledge of the country. A French agent managed to bring out of Russia a copy of the government map of the whole Empire, then recently made. It is even said that he contrived in some way to possess himself of the original plates on which it was engraved, and carry them off to Paris; but there is no evidence in the map itself of this apparently incredible feat having been performed. A map of Russia on a vast number of sheets, on the scale of 1/500,000, or about eight miles to the inch, was published in Paris, bearing dates 1813—1815, which was certainly the map of which Napoleon had the first use. However it was not printed from the Russian plates, but copied;[1] all the names are in Roman characters, not Russian, and there are French words where possible. Moreover, the whole appearance of the map is that of a copy made by some one who had to interpret what he saw as best he could, on general principles of map-making, without being helped by any knowledge of the country delineated. That the map Napoleon used was very faulty may be seen by comparing it with the more recent Russian survey. Nevertheless, it was a very valuable acquisition at that period, and Napoleon was naturally highly pleased. In November, 1811, we find him writing to Berthier:[2] "J'ai une très belle carte traduite de la

[1] Clausewitz seems to have used the original, which he calls (p. 179) the *porodochna* (passport) map; he says that the French translation is on a larger scale. Two copies of the French map are in the map-room of the Royal Geographical Society, but I have not been able to see a copy of the Russian original.

[2] Nap. Corr. 18,288.

Russie," and bidding him get one like it. When it came to the campaign, Napoleon found plenty of cause to demand information which the map might have supplied,[1] but did not. Still, with all its defects, it was of great value; it may safely be said that Wellington or Soult would have been thankful for a map of the Spanish peninsula one half as good.

On the twenty-seventh of January, 1812, Napoleon addressed to all his vassals of the Confederation of the Rhine a letter in which, after giving an account, which every one of them must have known to be utterly false, of his grounds of complaint against Russia, he formally called on each of them to have his contingent ready by the fifteenth of February, and to furnish at once a detailed statement of the troops composing it.[2] As soon as this order had been given, Napoleon assumed that *les troupes étant sur le pied de guerre*, they were to be supplied gratis wherever they were, *faute de quoi, elles le prendront*.[3] The tone was so completely that of a master, who does not even care to make things plausible, that it is scarcely wonderful that reports were soon current of his intention to annex the whole Confederation.[4] Napoleon had in fact taken a step which fell very little short of annexation, in issuing a decree "par lequel toute insulte faite à mes soldats *dans le territoire de la Grande Armée* est déférée au jugement d'une commission militaire française."[5] Even more despotic was his

[1] *E.g.*, Nap. Corr. 18,869, when the invasion was just beginning, and again, 18,930.

[2] Nap. Corr. 18,458.

[3] Lettres Inéd. 920.

[4] So at least the Russian envoy at Munich reported to Stackelberg at Vienna on the sixteenth of February. V. A. Russland, Auf dem Frank. Russ. Krieg, 1812.

[5] Lettres Inéd. 922.

behaviour to the King of Bavaria. Eugene Beauharnais was about to traverse his dominions with an army which Bavaria was expected to feed on its way, and which Napoleon, in order to draw larger supplies, declared to number 80,000 men. The first intimation which the King received of this was a letter from Berthier requiring that the Tyrolese roads should be cleared of snow.

Bavaria and Wurtemberg, Baden and Saxony, were after all Napoleon's vassals, and the princes had accepted the position more or less willingly, though they might repent of their bargain. Prussia was in form independent: perhaps for that very reason Napoleon treated the country in a manner even more scandalous. The terms of the treaty with France imposed a sufficiently heavy burden on the resources of Prussia; but Napoleon seized every opportunity for additional exactions, mostly small in themselves, but very serious in the aggregate. Nor were the losses entailed by Napoleon's deliberate demands all that the unhappy country had to suffer. Habits of pillage were too deeply engrained in the Imperial soldiery to be abandoned; the Emperor himself complained of the 3rd corps, "partout il porte la dévastation."[1] The peasantry were required to supply horses and vehicles for transport "que l'on gardait au moins jusqu'à ce que l'on en trouvât d'autres pour les remplacer. J'ai rencontré souvent des paysans à cinquante lieues de leurs villages, conduisant les bagages d'un régiment, et ces pauvres gens finissaient par se trouver heureux de pouvoir se sauver en abandonnant leurs chevaux."[2] Moreover he occupied Prussian fortresses, over which he had not a shadow of technical right, without

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,809.

[2] Fezensac, 203.

going through the form of asking the King's permission: Pillau as the citadel of Königsberg, Spandau as the citadel of Berlin, were occupied by French troops, though the Prussian flag was derisively left flying. Marshal Victor was told to assume the entire government of Berlin, to control the press, to punish by a military tribunal any assault on Frenchmen, to fill Spandau with French troops. As if his evil genius bade him mock the humiliation of Prussia and drive her people to madness, he tells Victor: "Si l'on demande la raison de cet armament, en doit répondre que l'importance de cette place exige qu'elle soit mise à l'abri de tout événement, et d'une descente des Anglais."[1] The King was powerless to resist these insolent usurpations, and afraid to express his resentment; in the mind of every patriot they swelled the already heavy sum of retribution to be exacted when the day of vengeance should at length dawn.

It is useless to follow in any detail the negotiations which preceded the war. Both parties were, for a year and a half before actual hostilities began, determined to fight rather than give way. Napoleon would naturally have preferred the unresisting submission of Russia: so far it was true that he did not desire war. Alexander sincerely desired peace, if it could be maintained without sacrificing his independence. The substitution of Lauriston for Caulaincourt as ambassador at St. Petersburg made no difference, any more than the special mission of Chernishev to Paris. In 1812 Napoleon took some trouble to gain time by negotiation, quite uselessly, as the Tzar had definitely resolved not to strike the first blow. It was apparently at his instigation that the King of Prussia sent Knesebeck to

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,708.

St. Petersburg in February, to suggest that the Tzar might make some proposals to Napoleon. Alexander had none to make; he had, as he said, given full proof of his desire for peace by keeping silence about the last annexations, but he was willing to listen to any explanations from France. Of course none came; the whole of the Grand Army was in Germany before the middle of April, most of it within a comparatively short distance of the Russian frontier, but Napoleon, as he wrote to Berthier about that time,[1] did not intend to begin the campaign till the grass was grown. Late in April a messenger from the Tzar reached Paris, and the Russian ambassador instantly communicated to Maret the proposals brought by him. The gist of them was that if French troops were entirely withdrawn from Prussia, so as to leave a neutral zone between Napoleon's armies and Russia, the Tzar was ready to satisfy Napoleon on commercial questions. This was not a proposition calculated to conciliate, though the tone of the communication was as peaceful as was possible; it was not unreasonable, but it could be taken as a veiled ultimatum. Napoleon, with his usual rudeness, gave no reply; but he immediately sent off Count Narbonne on a vague errand to the Tzar, in order to gain a little more time, making no reference to the Russian proposals.[2] Prince Kurakin asked time after time

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,667.

[2] The exact dates are not quite clear. Napoleon, in a letter to Berthier (Nap. Corr. 18,667), written on the twenty-fifth of April, speaks of the messenger having arrived on the fourteenth, but this must be a mistake, possibly a mere misprint for the twenty-fourth. Prince Kurakin in his note addressed to Maret on the thirtieth (Fain, i. 140) speaks of a private audience granted him by Napoleon on Monday the twenty-seventh, and of interviews with Maret *de vendredi* (twenty-fourth), *de lundi* (twenty-seventh), *et de mardi* (twenty-eighth); and he elsewhere says that he showed Maret his

for an answer, but Maret was not allowed to give one. At last, when it was announced that Napoleon was on the point of quitting Paris (the seventh of May), he wrote to the effect that, under the circumstances, he could only interpret the refusal of all reply as equivalent to choosing war, and that therefore he should be compelled to ask for his passports. Two days later, when the Emperor was actually starting, Maret sent a curt note asking if Kurakin had full powers to conclude an arrangement on all points of difference. As Kurakin had communicated all his instructions to Maret more than a fortnight before, this was a mere insult, to which there could be no rejoinder except a renewed request for his passports.[1] Under the circumstances Narbonne's mission was not likely to lead to anything, for the Tzar had good intelligence as to the movements in Germany; but he at any rate brought back a clear announcement of the Tzar's purpose. As he told De Pradt at Dresden, Alexander said that he did not under-estimate Napoleon's power, "mais qu'il n'avait qu'à prendre la carte de Russie, et qu'il verrait qu'il y avait de l'espace: que, pour lui, ce ne serait qu'au fond de la Sibérie qu'il signerait une paix ignominieuse."[2]

Meanwhile Napoleon had thought fit to go through the form of making fresh overtures of peace to England. His object was merely to be able to say that they had been

instructions two hours after receiving them. Napoleon's letter to the Tzar, sent by Narbonne, is dated on the twenty-fifth.

[1] This transaction was thus described by Napoleon at St. Helena: "We were far from war when suddenly a Russian army commenced its march towards the Duchy, and an insolent note was presented at Paris by the Russian ambassador, who threatened to leave Paris in eight days if it was not accepted." Las Cases, ii. 96.

[2] De Pradt, Hist. de l'Amb. 60.

made and rejected, and that therefore England was the sole obstacle to peace, for the offer was really derisive. On the seventeenth of April a despatch[1] was addressed to Lord Castlereagh, proposing as a basis—(1) the independence and integrity of Spain under *la dynastie actuelle;* (2) the return of the house of Braganza to Portugal; (3) Murat to retain Naples; (4) the Bourbons to retain Sicily; as to other matters, *chaque puissance gardera ce que l'autre ne peut pas lui ôter par la guerre.* This last clause is a characteristic specimen of Napoleon's diplomatic language; if it had been accepted as a basis for negotiation, he would have argued that England, who obviously could not forcibly take from him Holland or Illyria, for instance, had renounced any claim to a voice in the affairs of the Continent. It was, however, out of the question that the British government should listen seriously to any such proposals. Badajos, as Napoleon must have known, had fallen on the sixth of April; he was further than ever from controlling anything in Spain beyond the territories actually occupied by French armies. Castlereagh did not leave him long without an answer.[2] On the twenty-third of April he replied that if *la dynastie actuelle* in Spain meant Joseph, the Prince Regent was bound by his engagements to refuse to recognise him; if however it meant Ferdinand VII., he would state fully his views as to the bases suggested; meanwhile he should not notice the accusations and insinuations against England contained in the despatch. Here the correspondence closed. Napoleon at St. Helena said that his fraternal affection prevented his purchasing peace at the

[1] This despatch was in Maret's name, but it appears in Nap. Corr. 18,652, as having been dictated by the Emperor. It is in the genuine Napoleonic style: *e.g.*, it contains the assertion that the British Orders in Council had rendered the independence of Holland impossible.

[2] Printed in Fain, i. 127.

cost of Joseph's throne. In reality he had obtained all that he wanted—some kind of support for the false assertion that England had rejected reasonable terms. Within a week the Austrian ambassador was reporting[1] to Vienna that Napoleon considered that he had gone further than could be expected of him in the way of offers to England, though he took good care not to disclose what those offers had been.

The pretence that Napoleon desired peace, that he was anything but a wilful aggressor in the Russian war as in all others, was too hollow to deceive any one. Nearly two months before Kurakin was provoked into demanding his passports, Napoleon's own departure for the campaign was supposed in his own court to be so near at hand that the Empress was asking to accompany him. "There has been a terrible scene at the Elysée," it was reported[2] from the Austrian embassy on the twenty-first of March: "the Empress wants to go with Napoleon, but he will not allow it; he told her '*qu'il ne pouvait pas s'empêcher de lui dire qu'elle ne savait pas se concilier l'amour des Français, parcequ'elle ne se montrait pas bonne mère.*'" His refusal was reasonable in itself, for the campaign was to be no holiday procession, but the rudeness was in accordance with his ordinary conduct to women. Ultimately he agreed to a compromise, and when he summoned his reluctant allies to meet him in Dresden on his way to the Russian frontier, he allowed Maria Louisa to go so far with him, in order to see her parents.

Napoleon's stay in Dresden served no purpose except to

[1] Report of the fourth of May, V. A. Frankreich, Varia 1812.

[2] V. A. Frankreich, Varia 1812. Those who know Napoleon's habits will not find it difficult to account for his wife's behaviour.

gratify his taste for display. For the last time he exhibited himself before the eyes of (as he supposed) an admiring world, as the virtual master of the Continent, with a crowd of kinglets dancing attendance on him, and the heir of the Cæsars coming at his call. If he could have seen beneath the surface, have discerned the hatred which was veiled under so much obsequiousness, even he might have hesitated before taking the fatal plunge. It was to Dresden that Narbonne brought his report of the Tzar's resolution; but Napoleon was unshaken in his belief that he could carry on the war after his own fashion. He explained to Metternich[1] that he meant to make two campaigns of it. In the first he should conquer the ancient Polish provinces, and organise them for his own purposes during the winter, but he should not advance beyond Smolensk. In the second campaign, unless the Tzar submitted, he should invade and conquer Russia proper.

Jomini in his Life of Napoleon puts into the Emperor's mouth the opinion that Russia practically consisted of the two capitals and the army, and that there being every prospect of defeating the army in Lithuania, the resistance of Russia could not be formidable. If this be more than a rhetorical artifice suggested by the autobiographical form into which Jomini chose to cast his history—if any such opinion was really entertained by Napoleon, it would go far to explain his confidence of success. It was in a sense true: the Russian army was not a match for the invading host, and there were no great centres of national life except St. Petersburg and Moscow. Could Napoleon have compelled the Russians to concentrate for a great battle before Vilna, he would certainly have won a great victory. It was

[1] Metternich's Autobiography, i. 153.

because they conducted the war in a method which he did not seriously expect, that they were successful. He had not realised the possibility of this war being utterly unlike any other war which he had waged, and was satisfied that his forces were ample for ensuring success under any ordinary conditions.

The assembly on the Russian frontier of so enormous a mass as the Grand Army with all its *impedimenta* was necessarily a slow as well as a troublesome task. Napoleon's earlier orders assumed that operations would begin about the end of May, unless indeed things were precipitated by a Russian advance, which as a matter of fact never entered into the Tzar's mind, though Napoleon naturally could not feel sure of it. On the fourteenth of March he informed[1] the general commanding the artillery, with strict injunctions as to profound secrecy, that his intention was to open the campaign with the sieges of Dünaburg and Riga, bidding him send forward the siege trains so that they might have time to reach Vilna by the first of June. This accords exactly with his telling Davout six weeks later that, as he found that the grass would not be grown till the latter end of May, he desired not to be obliged to begin any important operations before the first days of June.[2] It accords also with the date of his own departure from Paris. Probably he received information at Dresden to the effect that things were not quite ready for the campaign. At any rate it is certain that Napoleon's own movements from the thirtieth of May, when he left Dresden, until he reached the frontier, were extremely leisurely, and that his orders during those three weeks show no signs of impatience,

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,579.
[2] Nap. Corr. 18,667.

such as appear plainly enough on the slightest provocation after he had entered Russia. A little delay was in his eyes of no importance, compared to beginning the invasion with overwhelming masses in the fullest state of equipment for war. Nor can his judgment on this point be reasonably impugned. He had ample time after midsummer for the task which he had set himself for the year 1812, driving the Russians out of the Polish provinces, always assuming that his calculations were correct (as in fact they were) as to his superiority in force. It is true that when he changed his mind, and pushed on towards Moscow, in the hope of dictating peace there, or after a great victory won before reaching the capital, the lateness of the season made this step more hazardous than it would have been a month earlier. But the fact that at a later time, under totally changed conditions, he found having lost June for campaigning a very serious injury, does not prove that he was able to help losing June, or that he was wrong in taking things quietly then. If Napoleon at the beginning of 1812 had contemplated striking at Moscow that year, he would certainly have hastened all preparations, so as to be able to begin the campaign at the earliest possible moment. The fault in his calculations lay in not having foreseen the chance of being unable to bring the Russians to a great battle anywhere in Lithuania, and consequently not having determined what to do in that contingency.

Down to the moment at which hostilities actually began not a word had been spoken by Napoleon in public, or allowed to appear in the French press, which even hinted at the possibility of war. The greatest military undertaking recorded in authentic history had in fact been commenced ten days before the nation on whose behalf it was professedly

carried on received any official intimation of it. When Napoleon quitted Paris early in May, the *Gazette Nationale*, in mentioning the fact, stated that the Emperor was going to inspect the Grand Army, and the Empress to see her parents. His subsequent movements are very scantily recorded. On the twenty-fourth of June, the first day of the passage of the Niemen, which had been fixed so long beforehand that it would have been perfectly possible to announce it on that day in Paris, there is merely a statement that the Emperor had been pleased with the appearance of certain Polish troops. On the fourth of July it reports the meeting of the Senate at which the actual beginning of the war was announced, and publishes the treaties by which Austria and Russia had some months before promised contingents. Not till the eighth of July was Napoleon's first or preparatory bulletin, dated the twentieth of June, given to the public, along with some diplomatic correspondence with Russia.

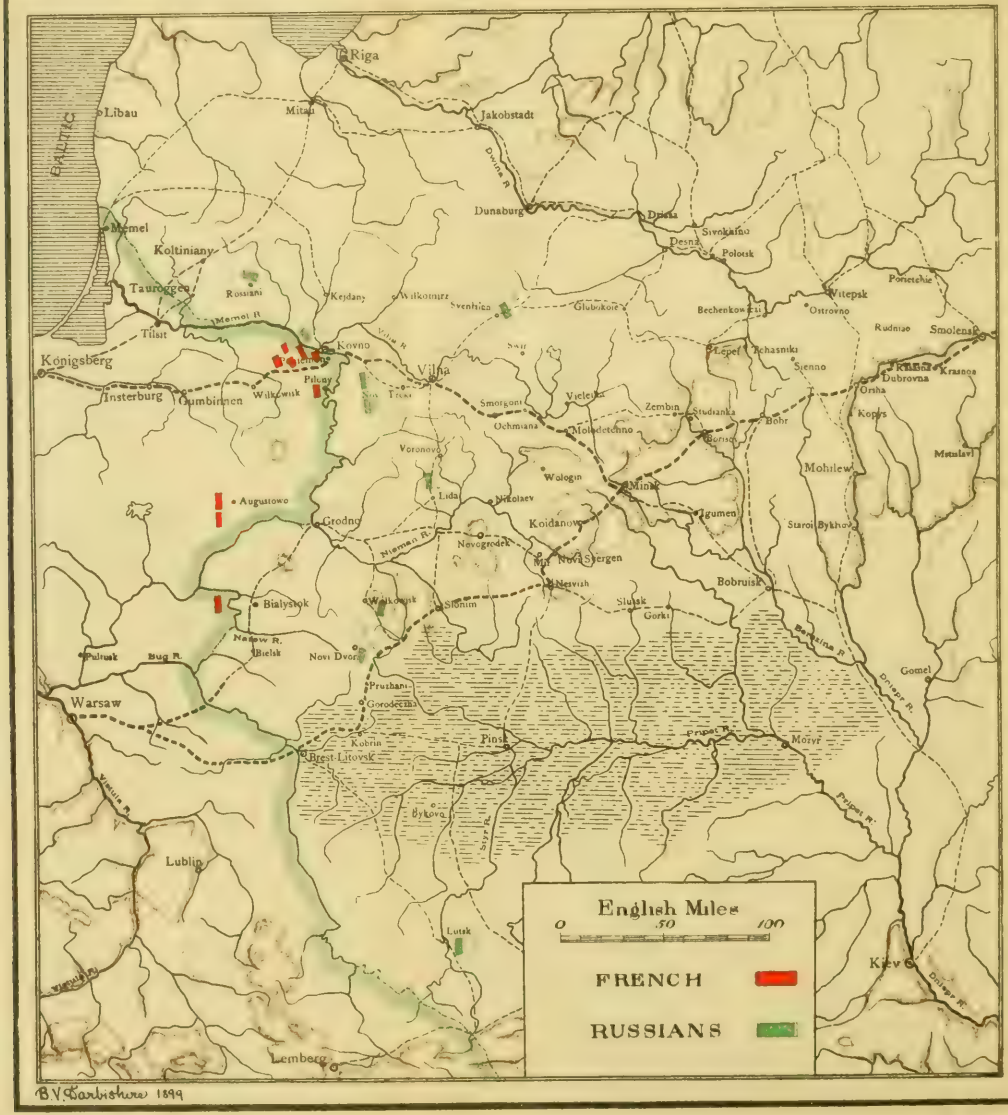
Of course the preparations had been no secret. France, like the rest of Europe, was well aware that a collision between the two great Empires was impending, and practically sure to take place in the summer of 1812, unless Russia flinched at the last minute. The ever-growing reluctance of the conscripts to join the ranks, evidenced by the number of refractory runaways, was probably due in part to dread of the utterly unknown and remote country to which the majority of them would be sent. Nevertheless official silence had its advantages: it spared Napoleon the necessity of inventing a plausible pretext for war, and it rendered impossible any exhibition of public opinion hostile to it. The Emperor kept such a tight hold on the French people, and especially on the press, that there is little

evidence as to the real state of feeling in the country. The nation had grown accustomed, during more than twelve years, to Napoleon's despotic authority. He had made war and peace according to his own pleasure, and had won so many dazzling triumphs that it seemed reasonable to expect that another war would mean more victories and fresh additions of territory, and glory of this kind has always been specially dear to the heart of the average Frenchman. The peasants, whose sons were called off to fill the ranks, doubtless many of them longed for a time when the armies might be disbanded; but Napoleon's levies were enormous even in peace, and war offered better prospects of wealth and promotion for individuals, besides national glory. The spell of the Emperor was still potent: the possibility of resisting his will hardly occurred to their minds. Doubtless also there were many among the educated classes who abhorred despotism, and only acquiesced in Napoleon's rule because they saw no prospect of its being overthrown; but they would not on this ground dislike another war. The fact that Napoleon's authority in France was not materially shaken by the Russian disaster seems to point to the conclusion that the war was at least not profoundly unpopular. It was to be waged at a distance, so that it could not touch French soil; the little that was known gave the prospect of a triumphant issue, and perhaps after that there would be peace.

So far as outward appearances went, Napoleon had the support of the whole Continent in a war of pure aggression, for which he never even attempted to formulate a technical justification. The force of despotism could hardly go further than thus to unite in one enterprise elements so discordant, for a purpose in which none had a real interest

except himself. Had Napoleon no knowledge of what lay beneath the surface, no suspicion that his allies and the bulk of his subjects were at best passively acquiescent in his rule, that there was very little devotion to his service outside the army? To believe this implies a very low estimate of his political insight; but the only possible alternative, that he knew his position to be precarious and was consciously staking all on one venture, is inconsistent with all the indications. Eye-witnesses[1] agree in reporting that his demeanour was perfectly calm and cheerful. His preparations, which had cost much labour and anxious thought, were quite complete; the enemy, by obstinately remaining passive, was leaving to him the advantage of the initiative. He had no misgivings but what the coming war would crown all previous wars, and make him the absolute master of Europe. *Quem Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.*

[1] *E.g.*, Floret reports to Metternich on the seventh of June: "L'Empereur est de la meilleure humeur, on ne l'a jamais vu si serène et content. Il ressemble à un homme qui a rempli sa besogne, et qui se repose en jouissant de ce qu'il a fait." V. A. Frank. Corr. 1812.



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CHAPTER IV.

RUSSIAN DEFENCE.

The Tzar's ukase of the thirty-first of December, 1810, was, and was meant to be, a declaration of independence as against Napoleon. It marked the definite resolve to risk war rather than submit permanently to the Continental System, but it went no further; it was very far indeed from an intention to take the initiative. Thenceforward however the questions of preparing for war, on what principles to conduct it, whether or not to strike the first blow, were incessantly before Alexander and his advisers. Every shade of opinion seems to have been represented among them. There was the forward party, who were confident in the power of Russia to contend with Napoleon, and thought it the wisest policy to anticipate him. It was they whose influence had brought about the overtures made to Austria in the latter part of 1810. Their views are well represented by the long memorandum presented to the Tzar at the beginning of 1811 by Admiral Mordvinov, the President of the Imperial council.[1] This paper is remarkable for the justness of its views on many points, but is far too optimistic both as to the strength of Russia and as to the prospect of gaining allies. The writer sees the true way of resisting an invader, by retreating before him, by

[1] Printed in Hardenberg, Mémoires, xiii. 204 *sqq.*

avoiding general actions, and employing floods of Cossacks to harass him. He sees also that the commerce to be opened by peace with England would be far more valuable than any armed assistance, and that it would be unwise to attempt to divert her energies from the Peninsula. He thinks that Napoleon calculates on Russia being weakened more and more by lack of trade, and that therefore it would be profitable to take up arms at once; and he reckons on thus inducing Austria and Prussia to co-operate. If this last could have been relied on with certainty, it might well have been the wisest course. But the other measure advocated by the forward party, that of attempting to win the Poles by offering them the restoration of their nationality with the Tzar as their constitutional King, would obviously alarm the other accomplices in the partition of Poland. The failure of the efforts made through Prince Adam Czartoryski, Alexander's intimate friend, to conciliate the Poles, furnished an obvious reason against action. If the Poles had welcomed Alexander, he must of course have occupied the duchy of Warsaw, and precipitated the struggle with Napoleon. As they proved determinedly hostile, it would be disadvantageous to make their territory the seat of war.

The Tzar's principal adviser, the Chancellor Rumantzov, was very strongly against war. He had come into office as representing the policy of Tilsit, alliance with France, and he clung obstinately to this, disapproving everything which seemed to imply the possibility of its breaking down. He and Metternich disliked and distrusted each other, and he consequently tended to regard Austria as hostile. Though this opinion went far beyond the truth, it was not absolutely false. Austria was intent on recovering her position in

Europe, and therefore primarily anxious for peace. Her own interests were paramount, but if she were free she would incline in favour rather of Russia than of Napoleon. Naturally, however, any uncertainty about the attitude of Austria would tend to influence the Tzar in the direction of standing strictly on the defensive. Mistrust of the firmness of the Prussian government, which the Tzar could not help feeling, would similarly tell against any reliance on that power. Of the sentiments of the Prussian people, which ultimately proved a more important factor, he probably knew nothing.

There were other influences at work in the Russian cabinet—adherence to the traditional policy of aiming at Constantinople, dread of financial embarrassment, an easy-going optimism which refused to believe that Napoleon would attack. And though the Tzar had fully made up his mind for war if necessary, he was very slow to form any definite scheme. He had no wish for war; there need be none, if Napoleon was reasonable. The prospect of finding efficient allies did not improve as time went on; but every month's delay might seem to furnish an additional hope that they would not be needed. Alexander's vague intentions gradually hardened into a fixed resolve neither to provoke a quarrel nor to accept provocation, to make his own internal arrangements for resisting attack if it came, without taking any steps outside his own dominions, and so to make it evident to all the world that the quarrel was forced on him. Though this substratum, so to speak, was firm enough, the details of Russian policy fluctuated considerably, under the conflicting influences brought to bear on the Tzar. The Chancellor's sole object was to do nothing, and the fact of his remaining in office furnished

to outsiders at least a presumption that his policy was still in the ascendant. To dismiss him would have been a declaration on Alexander's part that he had adopted a different policy, which was exactly what he was determined not openly to make; nor is there any indication that the Tzar wished to get rid of him. His retention of Rumantzov in office meant inspiring mistrust in England, the one obvious and firm ally of every enemy of Napoleon; but he was perfectly well aware both that peace with England would precipitate the war with France, and that if war came England would certainly make no difficulty about an alliance. Just as the Tzar's adoption of the plan for standing entirely on the defensive carried with it the inevitable loss of Prussian assistance, so the apparent adherence to his ancient policy implied in Rumantzov remaining Chancellor cost him something in other support from abroad. Perhaps it was a heavy price to pay, but the policy was consistent, and he could not carry it out without paying it.

The one undoubtedly evil result of the Tzar's policy was that, with ministers in responsible office who were hostile to war with France, it very easily happened that the preparations for war were inadequate and slow, that there was hesitation about taking measures which might be deemed provocative, which certainly were expensive, and which might prove unnecessary. At the same time the party of action occasionally had the upper hand; Napoleon certainly believed that Russia was more ready than she was, and expected from time to time a forward move on her part. In January, 1812, a British agent reported from St. Petersburg the expectation being current there that the Tzar would proclaim a constitution for Poland. But on

the whole the impression given abroad was one of irresolution and divided counsels. The Austrian and Prussian governments had solid grounds for their doubts as to the firmness of Russia, though the irresolution was rather superficial than fundamental.

It is more than probable that Napoleon from his previous experience calculated confidently on the Tzar's giving way, possibly before threats, certainly after sustaining a defeat or two. He had found him yielding at Tilsit and again at Erfurt, and thought he had gauged Alexander's character accurately. Opinion everywhere, in London, in Vienna, coincided with his; if English newspapers expressed their expectation that the Corsican would find the invasion of Russia too much for him, it was rather what they hoped than what they believed. How it came about that the soft and somewhat dreamy Alexander was inspired with a resolution which William the Silent could not have surpassed, and adhered to it in spite of pressure from his nearest and dearest, as well as from his most confidential adviser, is a psychological mystery. Stein is credited with great influence over him, but the evidence seems conclusive that the Tzar did not summon Stein to his side till after he had made up his mind finally, though Stein may well have helped him to resist the influence of his mother and brother in the period of disaster. Perhaps it was the consciousness of his mission as the head of a patriotic people, ready to sacrifice everything for his cause, which elevated his mind to a level of courage worthy of his station.

Much has been written about the example set by Wellington in the campaign of Torres Vedras having struck the imagination of the Tzar, and having determined his ultimate resolution to adopt similar measures. The

aspect of national resistance in Spain had no doubt its influence in Russia, just as it had inspired Stein and the Prussian patriots with a hope of raising a similar resistance in Germany. There was also an object lesson much nearer home, if more remote in time, in the campaign of Poltava which ruined Charles XII. But indeed no example was necessary; the general principle of avoiding decisive actions, and making the enemy feel the full effect of the great extent of the territory he was invading, was written on the face of things in unmistakable characters. On every side, we find indications that this was to be the Russian system of defence. English newspapers take it for granted; the Russian ambassador at Vienna, in a despatch[1] written many months before the war, starts from the assumption that the Tzar will even, if necessary, abandon St. Petersburg. Alexander himself avowed the intention of retreating indefinitely in case of need.[2] A very clear distinction however has to be drawn between a settled plan which did not exist, and the vague purpose which did exist. The latter was only another way of expressing the Tzar's resolution not to submit after a defeat or so. Beaten or inferior armies must retreat, obvious prudence dictates not fighting if you are likely to be beaten. The Russians would have fought on the frontier had they been strong enough; as they found themselves too weak, they took the only possible course, which the size of Russia rendered exceptionally advantageous. The notion that there was a subtle plan for luring on the invader to his ruin is a mere

[1] Stackelberg to Rumantzov, the first of February, V. A. Russland. Auf dem Frank. Russ. Krieg, 1812.

[2] *E.g.*, in a letter of the ninth of April to the governor of Odessa: Rochechouart, 167.

chimera, suggested by imperfect knowledge of the Russian counsels, perhaps also by a tacit assumption that there must have been something diabolically ingenious to explain the discomfiture of the invincible Napoleon.

In fact, there is good reason to think that Torres Vedras in one very important respect misled the Tzar, leading him to make a costly blunder, which only by good luck was not disastrous. Wellington, in Portugal, had a small country to defend, in which from the nature of the case invasion must be directed towards Lisbon, which was both the capital and Wellington's port of departure in case of need. By forming the lines of Torres Vedras, he at once provided the capital of Portugal with defences that might be stormed but could not be turned, and guarded himself against any risk of being cut from his base of operations. Moreover, that base was the sea, itself absolutely unassailable by the enemy; Portugal might be lost, but at worst Wellington's army was safe. The case of Russia is different in every respect. The invader was by no means bound to aim at a single point; he might strike at either Moscow or St. Petersburg with equal effect, even if he did not content himself with occupying the provinces formerly Polish. A great fortified camp, if it barred the road to one capital, invited the invader to select the other; moreover, in the vast expanse of plain any such defence could be turned with perfect ease. The camp of Drissa, which was intended to be the keystone of the Russian system of defence, proved worse than useless. So far as it was an imitation of the lines of Torres Vedras, it was an apt illustration of the misleading effects of a false analogy.

It was probably another consequence of the mixed and partially conflicting influences about him, that the Tzar

was so slow in taking steps for protecting the northern and southern flanks of his huge Empire, a precaution absolutely necessary before he could engage in a struggle at the centre with any hope of success. The secret agreement of Tilsit had provided that Russia should be at liberty, without interference from France, to conquer Finland from Sweden, and the Danubian provinces from Turkey. The former piece of robbery was undertaken with little delay, and was achieved with little difficulty: the first act of Charles XIII., who succeeded to the Swedish throne on the deposition of Gustavus IV., was to make peace with Russia, formally ceding Finland (the seventeenth of September, 1809). Almost from the first Sweden treated the loss of this province as irrevocable. In truth, it is some excuse for the Russian aggression, that foreign guns almost commanded the access to her capital so long as Sweden retained possession of Finland. On the other hand Finland was separated from Sweden by the sea, and was thus not easily defensible. Sweden, however, with Finland gone, and hostile Denmark in possession of Norway, was in a miserably feeble position, aggravated rather than alleviated by her retaining a portion of Pomerania, at the mercy of the power dominant in north Germany.

The election of Bernadotte to be Crown Prince of Sweden, which took place in August, 1810, was intended to conciliate Napoleon, and seemed at first sight to place Sweden definitely among his vassals. In truth, however, it was through his policy that Sweden took the other side. Napoleon, who knew that Bernadotte was by no means his devoted follower, saw his elevation with no pleasure, and according to a well-known story foretold on taking leave of him what in fact took place. Napoleon's accusations of

black ingratitude, uttered in the leisure of his captivity, were as preposterously unfair as his contemptuous talk about him before the Russian war was misplaced. It was the obvious duty of the Crown Prince of Sweden to identify himself with his adopted country; and when he had made up his mind where her true interests lay, he steered her course with admirable skill and patience, if with an admixture of that craft which is the inevitable weapon of the weak in dealing with the strong.

At first, however, all went as Napoleon desired. Sweden yielded to his imperious demands, and declared war on England; and though England, perfectly aware that this step was taken under compulsion, made very lenient use of her naval supremacy in the Baltic, Sweden was poor enough to feel severely the losses which the war entailed. Bernadotte's position was a very difficult one. As a Frenchman he was open to the suspicion of having sacrificed Sweden to his native country, and was therefore all the more anxious to gain the good-will of the Swedes by obtaining for them some compensation for the loss of Finland. As a Frenchman and as a soldier he was an object of suspicion to Russia, who expected that he would place the strength of Sweden at Napoleon's disposal whenever the latter attacked Russia. And though very soon after he assumed the reins of government we find him protesting to a Russian envoy[1] that he felt Sweden, as now situated, to be virtually dependent on the Tzar, the Russian government remained for a year longer uncertain what he really intended. Bernadotte

[1] Chernishev to the Tzar, the seventh of December, 1810, in vol. xxi. of Collection of Russian State Papers: Chernishev had been sent to Stockholm on a special mission to report on Bernadotte's political attitude.

was not more scrupulous than his contemporaries as to territorial acquisitions; and in times when no ancient landmarks were respected, it was perfectly natural that he should aim at obtaining Norway. Indeed, but for the traditional hostility of many centuries, the union of Norway with Sweden would have been an excellent arrangement for both countries. The Scandinavian peninsula is marked out by nature for the home of a single nation, maritime and commercial within the limits allowed by its climate, and protected by the sea from attack. Unfortunately sentiment has as a matter of fact proved stronger than interest or than geography, and the two countries work uneasily together.

It does not appear exactly at what date Bernadotte formulated his proposal that Russia should obtain Norway for him in return for the Swedish alliance, but it was not at variance with Russian interests, and therefore raised no difficulty. The real reason why there were so many months delay before the two powers came to a definite understanding lay in the divided counsels of Russia, where the only stable thing discernible was the Tzar's determination not to provoke war with France. Napoleon, suspicious of Bernadotte personally, and well aware that Sweden was most anxious for peace with England, insisted with growing violence on Sweden's submitting to every order he chose to make for enforcing his Continental System, and even tried to place French customs officers in Swedish ports. Finally, in January, 1812, he occupied Swedish Pomerania, an act which naturally brought about the long pending definite alliance between Sweden and Russia (the fifth of April, 1812). Napoleon in his arrogance did not consider that he had done any wrong to Sweden; months afterwards he made

overtures to Bernadotte on the assumption that the side to be taken by Sweden in the impending war was still doubtful. The Crown Prince, like the rest of the world, was impressed by the hesitations visible in Russian official action, and hardly aware of the Tzar's firm resolve to fight rather than yield to Napoleon's dictation. He therefore returned a temporising verbal answer to the extraordinary suggestions made to him verbally, according to Napoleon's common practice, in order that they might be disavowed; but his choice was already made. In fact, he had been for some time trying to induce England to join in guaranteeing Norway to him. The British government[1] was perfectly ready to put a formal end to a war which had itself been little more than formal, but was doubtful of Bernadotte personally. Castlereagh refused to make any promises about Norway, while giving Sweden the very sensible advice to do everything possible to conciliate the Norwegians, but was willing to undertake that the British fleet should defend Sweden against invasion, or even against French or Danish troops being passed over into Norway. He saw plainly enough that a Swedish attack on Norway would ruin all hope of a diversion from that quarter in rear of Napoleon, when he had committed himself to invading Russia. On the other hand, Bernadotte urged with some force that the prospect of acquiring Norway was the only thing which would make the Swedish people willing to join in the war. England, however, would go no further, and the active participation of Sweden was deferred, partly also through her poverty, till after the failure of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. Meanwhile however the Russian

[1] Instructions to Thornton, the thirteenth of March, 1812, R. O. Sweden, 216.

troops could be withdrawn from Finland, though this was done too late to allow of these forces coming into line to withstand the first shock.

As a second result of the Tilsit conspiracy, Russia, like France, was hampered by a protracted and troublesome war beyond her southern frontier. It was a well-established maxim of Russian policy to seize every opportunity for aggrandisement at the expense of Turkey; and the Tzar, as soon as he was sure of Finland, had directed his armies towards the lower Danube. Moldavia and Wallachia were speedily overrun, but the war passed through several vicissitudes, and the Sultan was far from submitting to the permanent loss of those provinces. Napoleon began to be jealous of the comparative success of his nominal brother and ally, and tried to induce Austria to intervene. The navigation of the lower Danube was of vital importance for Austria, who was also resentful of the hostile part played by Russia during the Wagram campaign. But in 1810 Austria was too weak from the losses of that war to fight again if it could possibly be avoided. Metternich, as has been shown already, early divined the probable course of events, and saw that the true interest of Austria lay in quiescence. How far he trusted the Tzar's assurances that he sought for no conquests south of the Danube, or Napoleon's assurances that he would never permit it,[1] can only be conjectured. At any rate he thought that the balance of advantage lay in doing nothing, though whatever

[1] Napoleon told the Russian envoy that a Russian advance beyond the Danube was one of the only two things which could cause a breach between him and the Tzar, but threats from his mouth did not necessarily mean more than ordinary diplomatic representations. Chernishev to the Tzar, the twenty-third of October, 1810, in vol. xxi. of Russian State Papers.

influence Austria possessed at Constantinople was exerted in favour of peace.

Thus the war on the Danube dragged its course along, favoured alike by the partisans of France among the Tzar's counsellors, and by the adherents to old traditions, until it was virtually certain that Napoleon meant war. Then the Tzar felt that peace must be made with Turkey, whatever sacrifice of his conquests it might involve. Negotiations with a power like Turkey are always slow: ministers are not incorruptible, political influences take the form of palace intrigues, the decision of to-day is very likely to be withdrawn or modified to-morrow. Hence the Tzar paid dearly for the conflict of policy in his own councils. It was not until May, 1812, that the Treaty of Bucharest was signed, by which he retained only Bessarabia, abandoning the rest of the territories he had occupied; even then all was not clear for the withdrawal of the Russian army from the Danube. The Sultan was by this time fully aware of the faithlessness with which Napoleon at Tilsit had abandoned to Russia "the most ancient ally of France," and had therefore no motive whatever for making sacrifices in order to help Napoleon. Nevertheless the French ambassador was able to make so much impression on the Sultan, that there seemed a fair chance of his repudiating the treaty and resuming the war. So late as the third of August, Chichagov, the Russian commander, was still at Bucharest, writing to say that his army was at last beginning to move northwards, and explaining what steps he proposed to take if the Turks resumed hostilities.[1] Thus the army of the Danube, instead of helping to repel Napoleon's invasion,

[1] Chichagov to the Tzar, the twenty-second of July to the third of August, 1812, vol. vi. of Russian State Papers.

was only just in time to intercept his retreat. No doubt its weight was in this way more effectively applied, but none the less the long indecision before closing the Turkish war was a blunder: a small change in the course of events would have rendered Chichagov's army altogether unavailable against Napoleon.

Napoleon had so often and so emphatically declared that making peace with England was one of the two things which he would never permit Russia to do, that the Tzar was compelled, in order to preserve his attitude of giving no offence, and thus throwing the full responsibility for rupture on France, to postpone to the last moment any formal agreement with that power. He lost nothing by this, as he was perfectly aware would be the case. In the summer of 1811 Lord Wellesley had entrusted to Zea Bermudez, the Spanish envoy to St. Petersburg, a despatch for the Russian government,[1] which is a very singular communication to send to a power with which Great Britain was at war. In it he declared that England had no hostile feelings against Russia, and would be ready to accept as an ally any state that desired to act independently, though she fully recognised the necessity of waiting till a fit opportunity for action arose. Alexander would send no written reply, though he verbally assured the Spaniard that he would not withdraw any troops from the Polish frontier, which was really helping the Spanish cause, as it would keep French troops away from the Peninsula. Not until April, 1812, did he make up his mind that the time was come to make advances on his side. Thornton, the English agent sent to Stockholm in March, was instructed to see the Russian envoy Nikolai, and inform him that England was ready to

[1] R. O. Russia, 199.

listen to overtures from Russia, though "as every pacific overture from us was, according to the system of France, a demand for hostilities against the latter," the British government thought it only fair to let each nation judge for itself when to take the first steps.[1] Within a few days Nikolai came to him with instructions, dated before their first interview, to propose an alliance, and on the strength of the great service which Russia was about to render, to ask that England should take over a loan of about four millions raised by Russia in Holland. At the same time the Russian Chancellor wrote to Thornton requesting that an English ambassador of high rank, if possible Lord Wellesley, might be sent to St. Petersburg as soon as matters had progressed far enough.[2] The financial position of Russia was bad: years of the complete cessation of maritime commerce had exhausted her seriously, though England, admirably served in the Baltic by Admiral Saumarez, had used her naval superiority with moderation. Hence there was some little excuse for this exorbitant request, which the British government refused to entertain, saying with perfect truth that they were best serving the common cause by concentrating their efforts on the Peninsula. Disappointed in this attempt on what the whole Continent seems to have regarded as the inexhaustible purse of Great Britain, the Russian government delayed the formal conclusion of peace until after hostilities with France had actually begun. Sweden also, partly in imitation of the Russian example, partly in the hope of inducing

[1] Thornton to Castlereagh, the ninth of April, 1812, R. O. Sweden, 217; see also Thornton's Instructions, dated the thirteenth of March, R. O. Sweden, 216.

[2] Thornton to Castlereagh, the twenty-fourth and twenty-ninth of April, R. O. Sweden, 217.

England definitely to promise to help Sweden to obtain Norway, postponed the signature of any treaty. Thornton had been given full powers to sign treaties with both powers, Lord Cathcart had been selected as ambassador to Russia, so that the British government had done all that rested with them, short of committing themselves to back Russia and Sweden in all their aspirations. When at last Cathcart started for his embassy, he was given secretly the discretionary power[1] to spend half a million in helping Russia in emergencies, so that lack of funds might not lead to any serious harm. The campaign to be conducted was not, however, of such a character as to be affected by greater or less scarcity of money. It depended on the available resources of the Russian Empire in men and material, and still more upon the geography.

The frontier between Russia and the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, in 1812, ran roughly north and south from the point where it left Austrian territory nearly to the Baltic. The northern portion, which from the point of view of Napoleon's invasion is by far the most important, was formed by the Niemen from Grodno downwards. This river, after a westward course of over one hundred miles, turns north at Grodno, and about eighty miles further, near Kowno, makes another abrupt bend westwards towards the Baltic, which it enters by the Kurisches Haff. Navigable from some distance above Grodno, it flows during the whole of its northward course in a deeply sunk channel, affording very few points of passage. There was a bridge at Grodno, and another at Tilsit, near the mouth of the river—the scene of the famous conference between the two

[1] Cathcart's Instructions, dated the twenty-fourth of July, 1812, R. O. Russia, 200.

Emperors in 1807. The road which crossed it at Kowno was served only by a ferry; but in all the distance between Grodno and Kowno there was not even a ferry. Half-way from Kowno to the sea the Niemen entered Prussia, having the Prussian fortress of Memel on the right bank. This enabled Napoleon to control the navigation, and to make use of the Niemen, when once the invasion had begun, to bring part of his supplies by water, *viâ* the lagoons which line the coast from Dantzic to Memel. The southern portion of the frontier was formed by the river Bug, which, emerging from Galicia, flows northwards over one hundred miles to Brest-Litovsk, thence north-westwards for seventy miles more, ultimately turning westwards and falling into the Vistula below Warsaw. From Grodno on the Niemen to about the point where the Bug turns westwards, a distance of nearly one hundred miles, the frontier, which here bulged to the westwards, was not marked by any natural features requiring attention. The entire line from Galicia to the Baltic had a length of about 475 miles; but the vast Pinsk marshes, beginning a little way on the Russian side of the Bug, afforded an effectual protection to about half of it. As Austria had stipulated with Napoleon that her territories should not be entered by his armies, no account need be taken of the Austro-Russian frontier. There were Austrian forces in observation both in Galicia and in Transylvania, but they took no hostile steps; indeed, the usual trade[1] went on across the frontier during the war.

The regions lying east of the Niemen and Bug were of course the provinces of Poland that had been annexed by Russia at the partition—Lithuania east of the Niemen,

[1] Chichagov to the Tzar on the second of August, 1812, in Russian State Papers, vol. vi.

with Courland on the Baltic coast, Volhynia and Podolia to the south. Lithuania was a very poor and thinly inhabited country, possessing no resources except at Vilna and Minsk. There are no hills worthy of the name, none that would offer any facilities for reconnoitring; but part of the ground is very uneven, with small elevations and streams flowing in deep channels. Much of it was covered by woods, more by marshes; the woods were especially thick down the right bank of the Niemen as far as Kowno. The main roads were but few, and the minor roads mere tracks. The soil being soft, it was scarcely feasible to march troops across the open country, even where the woods and marshes did not present impassable obstacles; the innumerable vehicles attending the army could not move at all except on the chief roads, and these were very rapidly cut up in bad weather. South of the upper Niemen there was a fertile and well cultivated district about Bialystok; but the Narew, which passes near it, to join the Bug near Warsaw, was bordered with marshes. In fact the whole country east of the frontier south of Grodno, with few exceptions, was one vast marsh, extending over thousands of square miles, pierced by scarcely a road, and presenting an impenetrable military obstacle.

The boundaries between Russia and Poland had been altered so many times that it is scarcely accurate to speak of any line as the old frontier of Russia. Substantially, however, it is true that beyond the Dwina and the Dnieper the whole country was thoroughly Russian, perfectly submissive to the Tzar and abhorring the invader. The two rivers form a second line of defence behind the Niemen and Bug, though by no means at equal distances, or parallel except in the most general sense. The former

river, flowing out of Russia, turns west-north-west at Vitepsk, and follows thence a fairly straight course to Riga. It is navigable from above Vitepsk, though fordable at some places during the heat of summer. The only bridges within the sphere of the campaign were at Vitepsk and Dünaburg. Its channel is not so deeply cut as that of the Niemen, and the left bank commands the right most of the way from Vitepsk to Dünaburg; hence it is not a very advantageous line of defence. The country on the right bank was of much the same character as Lithuania, full of woods and marshes and thinly inhabited. The shortest distance between the Dwina and the Niemen, from Kowno to Dünaburg, is little over one hundred miles, but from the Niemen to Vitepsk it is 250 miles.

Between the Dwina and the Dnieper is a gap like that between the Niemen and the Bug, but only of half the extent, the distance from Vitepsk to Orsha being about forty-five miles. Thiers calls this gap somewhat grandiloquently *les portes de l'Orient;* and it is obvious that so far as the rivers were serious military obstacles, the interval between them afforded the easiest access to the heart of Russia. The first genuinely Russian city, Smolensk, stands on the Dnieper about seventy miles east-north-east of Orsha and slightly further from Vitepsk, though the Dwina and the Dnieper are nowhere nearer to one another than on the line from Vitepsk to Orsha.

The Dnieper, which is navigable from Dorogobuzh far above Smolensk, turns due south at Orsha, and flows parallel to the frontier, nearly 250 miles to the east of it, falling ultimately into the Black Sea. The only bridges on it which enter into the campaign were at Smolensk and Mohilew; nor is it fordable even in summer except at a few

places. The Berezina, rising not far south of the Dwina, gradually converges towards the Dnieper, falling into it about due east of Warsaw and Brest-Litovsk. There were two bridges at Borisov and Bobruisk, where the river is crossed by great roads, but it is fordable at most places in summer; and as the right bank commands the left except at two places, it was not a very serious obstacle to the invader. Lower down, the Pripet brings into the Dnieper the whole drainage of the Pinsk marshes; but this region lies outside the actual theatre of the war.

So much has been done of late years both in draining the marshes and in making roads and railways, that a recent map gives very little idea of the state of the country in 1812. Buturlin, the contemporary Russian historian of the campaign, gives a careful account of the roads existing at that time. The roads on map No. II. have been drawn in accordance with his description; and though there were of course many minor tracks used by the inhabitants, it may be taken that those shown on the map were all by which armies could then move tolerably, and that many even of these were very bad. It will be seen that between the road which leads towards Kiev from just north of the corner of Galicia, and what may be called the Baltic coast road from Tilsit to Riga, there are but three points where great roads crossed the frontier—Brest-Litovsk, Grodno, and Kowno, and that even from the first of these the only available route for invasion ran north-east, converging towards the others. The mere bridging of the frontier rivers was a simple task, but it was useless to throw bridges except where they would bring the troops on to roads suitable for advance.

Napoleon had been making loud complaints ever since 1810 of the hostile action of the Tzar in fortifying his

frontier, declaring that it indicated an intention to attack the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. It is of course true that Russia looked with very unfriendly eyes on the organisation of the core of ancient Poland into a state dependent on Napoleon; but when the activity displayed by Napoleon in equipping fortresses along the Vistula is remembered, it is obvious from a glance at the map that the Russian preparations, such as they were, bore an entirely defensive character. Riga, on the Baltic coast, 140 miles from the frontier, had been converted into a fortress, which withstood the nominal siege laid to it by Napoleon's directions. As Russia was at war with England, in pursuance of the Tilsit stipulations, fortifying Riga was an obvious measure of naval defence, and had hardly the remotest bearing on the possibility of war with France. It did not even lie on the way to St. Petersburg, if Napoleon had chosen that line of invasion, though he would have been obliged to mask it in that case. Kiev had been fortified, the large town on the Dnieper, further south than the southernmost point of the frontier of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and nearly 300 miles off. If this was a hostile step, the provocation was directed against Austria only; certainly Kiev could have been concerned in no conceivable aggressive operation against Napoleon. Dünaburg, at the point where the St. Petersburg road crosses the Dwina, and Bobruisk, low down the Berezina, on the road which passes north of the Pinsk marshes, were important places for sustaining defence against invasion; but as the former is over one hundred miles from the frontier and the latter double that distance, it was preposterous to affirm that the fortification of them was a threatening act as against the duchy of Warsaw. Equally defensive in character was the *tête-de-pont* at Borisov, where

the main road from Warsaw to Moscow crosses the Berezina; this proved an important strategic point during Napoleon's retreat, but not on his advance.

It must be added that, owing to the divided counsels prevailing in Russia, comparatively little of the proposed works had been completed. The fortifications of Dünaburg had been merely traced out, and Bobruisk was not very formidable; nor were the works at Borisov as extensive as they might with advantage have been. Riga indeed had been adequately fortified, but otherwise the Russians expended their energies, so far as engineering defence was concerned, upon the one undertaking which was based on a wrong principle. The great intrenched camp at Drissa, forty or fifty miles higher up the Dwina than Dünaburg, is always said to have been constructed in imitation of Torres Vedras, and it has already been pointed out that the analogy was entirely misleading. The vast extent of Russia, and the open nature of the country, making retreat in any direction feasible, furnish the strongest arguments against the system of Russian defence being bound to any fixed points. Fortifications to protect an indispensable port like Riga, or an obvious strategic point like Borisov, were of course right; but an intrenched camp serves no purpose except to enable the army which occupies it to fight with advantage on that particular spot, and is useless if the enemy need not attack it. It is of course not true that Torres Vedras was a new departure in the art of war; rather it was a survival, only appropriate because of special topographical conditions, from an obsolete order of things. The wars of the seventeenth century, and to a lesser extent of the eighteenth, are full of fortified lines and intrenched camps, and their futility had been repeatedly demonstrated from Turenne's

time onwards. The Russians had themselves constructed after Eylau a great intrenched camp at Heilsberg; and though Napoleon, at the opening of the short Friedland campaign, had lost thousands of men in an unsuccessful attempt to storm it, this momentary success did not help the Russians. They had to abandon their camp as soon as Napoleon turned it, as a general more careful of his soldiers' lives would have done without assaulting it at all. Moreover, the situation of the Drissa camp was very ill chosen, as is pointed out by the Prussian Clausewitz, probably the most scientific soldier who took part in the war. It was between the two great roads to Moscow and to St. Petersburg, too far from the former to be of any use at all in barring the way to an invader aiming at Moscow, and not actually on the latter, which made the position easy to turn. Nor was the natural strength of the ground such as to give exceptional advantages, which might palliate the selection of a spot strategically undesirable. Clausewitz does not say that a better place could have been selected in the same neighbourhood; in a flat country it is hard to discover a really valuable position. The difficulty, however, of finding one furnished a further reason against making the defence depend upon any fixed point.

The numbers and composition of the Russian armies are set forth with much less particularity than those of the French, by most of the contemporary historians of the campaign—naturally enough, as the large majority of them were Frenchmen. According to Clausewitz, who tends to be rather severe on the shortcomings of the Russians, the total forces of the Empire amounted on paper to 600,000, and he argues from the fact that no effort was made before the war to increase them above that figure, that Russia

could furnish no more. The effective strength, according to him, was however only 420,000, the difference being accounted for by defective organisation, and neglect or corruption in one quarter or another. This total he distributes as follows :—

I.	First army, in Lithuania	90,000
	Second army, south of the first	50,000
	Third army, in Volhynia	30,000
	Cossacks in all	10,000
	Available to meet the first shock of invasion	180,000
II.	Reserves on Dwina and Dnieper	30,000
	Reserves brought into the field later	50,000
		80,000
III.	Army in Finland	20,000
	Army in Moldavia	60,000
		80,000
IV.	On eastern frontiers	30,000
	Garrisons	50,000
		80,000

Of the fourth item nothing need be said; whether the figures be correct or not, these troops did not and could not take the field against Napoleon. The armies from Finland and Moldavia took a decisive part in the end of the campaign, but at the outset it is not necessary to consider their strength. The later reserves are only roughly estimated by Clausewitz, and the other authorities have not attempted to give figures. The first reserves are given in

tolerable detail as to both numbers and position by Sir Robert Wilson, who had probably better sources of information than Clausewitz; he makes the total 34,300, but this is, of course, no serious discrepancy.

In respect to the field armies, however, the figures given by Clausewitz differ very widely from those of other writers. The Russian Buturlin, who is in some sense the official historian of the campaign, describes in detail the composition of each of the field armies, specifying the infantry regiments, squadrons, and companies of artillery, with the names of the generals commanding brigades. This is done in the tables forming part of his atlas volume, but he there gives no numbers whatever. In the text he states the proper full strength of each unit, but where he sums up the numbers of each army he makes the actual total about 12½ per cent. below the paper strength. Chambray, adopting Buturlin's statistics as correct, as they no doubt are, calculates as follows: he computes the nominal numbers from Buturlin's units, all of which except in one division he asserts to have been completed; he then deducts 5 per cent. for sick men, etc., and assumes all the rest to have been in the field. This deduction is obviously too small; Buturlin's totals, though he does not explain how they are obtained, are much more in accordance with general probability. Clausewitz's figures run lower still, and the relative strength of the three armies is very differently given; he estimates the first and third armies at little over two-thirds of Buturlin's numbers, while he attributes to the second a strength somewhat greater. The source of his error it is impossible to discover, but it can hardly be doubted that the official account, accepted as substantially correct by the careful and accurate Chambray as well as by Sir Robert

Wilson, is more trustworthy than an estimate made even by so distinguished an expert as Clausewitz. The Russian certainly had no interest in exaggerating the numbers of the forces which in the long run achieved so astonishing a success.

All authorities being agreed as to the proper paper strength of the armies to which the active defence of Russia was entrusted at the outset of the war, it is most convenient to state these figures first. The "first army of the west," under Barclay de Tolly, ought to have consisted of about 111,000 infantry, 20,000 cavalry, 13,000 artillery, besides 9,000 Cossacks—a total of over 150,000, which, however, only gave an actual effective force of 127,000. For the "second army of the west," commanded by Prince Bagration, the figures were similarly 43,000 infantry, 7,500 cavalry, 4,000 artillery, and 4,500 Cossacks, a total of nearly 60,000 men, of whom he had in the field 48,000. The third army, under Tormazov, was stronger than Bagration's in cavalry, but much weaker in infantry; its effective force may be put at 43,000. The reserves on the Dwina and Dnieper amounted to from 30,000 to 35,000 more; but even with the addition of these troops the Russian field armies were only about half the strength of the host which Napoleon actually led across the frontier at the commencement of the war. This seems but a poor exhibition of the strength of an Empire so vast as Russia, especially seeing that the war had been foreseen for at least a year and a half. It must be remembered, however, not only that Russia was then almost as poor and thinly peopled as she was vast, but also that the political condition was equally backward. The bulk of the population being serfs, the only method of recruiting was to require the nobles to supply a certain

proportion of their serfs for the army. As this withdrew them from the lands of their masters, where they were rendering service more or less profitable, the pecuniary interest of the nobles lay in sending as few as possible, and those the unruly or the idle ; and their patriotism, or regard for other interests threatened by war, did not outweigh the direct advantage to their pockets. Nor did the soldiers in general serve willingly ; the period of military service being twenty-five years, they left their homes practically for ever ; their intelligence was also lower on the average than that of the French conscript. Under these conditions, it speaks volumes for the endurance of the race that they should have made as good soldiers as they actually proved themselves. To passive obedience they were brought up ; but the tenacity with which they always fought, the absence of any tendency to panic, cannot be attributed to mere obedience.

One is tempted to wonder that the Tzar should ever have supposed it possible to defend his frontiers with so inadequate a force. It is not as if he had been ignorant of the formidable character of Napoleon's preparations ; these were sufficiently notorious to all the world. Moreover, he was not without more specific information : Chernishev had, while in Paris, bribed an underling of the War Office to procure copies of official documents—an act of which Napoleon very naturally complained, though his description of it as a violation of *le droit des gens* was absurd. It is indeed possible that this information was really misleading to the Russians. Obviously authentic so far as it went, and therefore deserving to be trusted, it might easily suggest the inference that it was also complete, while really falling far short of completeness. Whether this was so or not, it is

practically certain that the Tzar expected to put into the field numbers more nearly approaching the paper strength of the Empire, and did not discover till too late that his anticipations would not be realised. The schemes of defence formed and discussed at the Russian head-quarters were somewhat incoherent, but they are all based on the assumption of strength not very inferior to the invader. Had the Tzar or his advisers been conscious that they would be so enormously outnumbered at the outset as to have only the choice between immediate retreat and destruction, they would never have dreamed of (for instance) the second army falling on Napoleon's flank while he was engaged in pushing back the first army. Though there was no one of first-rate strategic ability among them,[1] they were men of fair capacity, and of some experience both political and military, and would certainly not have entertained ideas worthy of the most ignorant and presumptuous of Spanish insurgents.

Much has been written by historians of the campaign concerning the men who were then about the person of the Tzar and their schemes of defence, but the facts corresponded so little to any prearranged schemes that it is a waste of time to dwell on them. Alexander at first considered it his proper duty to exercise the supreme command in person; though he had seen little of war, he had studied it theoretically under the tuition of General Phull, who had quitted the Prussian service in despair after Jena, and taken

[1] The Prussian Clausewitz was undoubtedly a first-rate theoretic soldier, but he was of inferior rank, recently arrived in Russia and ignorant of the language; hence he never attained to a position in which his strategic skill might have been of great value. Gneisenau, afterwards Blucher's chief of the staff, abandoned all idea of taking service under the Tzar when he found how fatally his ignorance of the Russian tongue would interfere with his exercising command.

service in Russia. The latter was a man of much book-learning, but dreamy and unpractical; it is to his influence that the one great mistake was due, of preparing the fortified camp at Drissa as the basis for defence. Beyond this error, which, after all, cost little more than a vast amount of labour wasted, it cannot be said that the previous discussion of plans produced any tangible result. The Tzar had made up his mind that he would stand on the defensive, and also that he would retreat to Siberia rather than submit; all the rest followed almost of necessity from this resolve, and from the impulse of Napoleon's initiative.

The situation was in some respects similar to that at the opening of the Waterloo campaign. The Tzar, like the Allies in 1815, had made up his mind to leave the initiative to his enemy: he had therefore to watch the whole of a wide frontier, and so to post his troops as to be able to concentrate them for resistance wherever the attack was made. This was no easy problem at the best, and especially difficult in face of Napoleon's great rapidity of action. It was easy, as in Belgium, to see what was the most obvious point of attack, but a general possessing Napoleon's fertility of resource might very possibly select a different line, and was sure to do so if he found that the Russians were preparing to meet him on one only. Moreover, merely watching the frontier would not suffice; it was necessary to post near it troops enough to impede the advance of the invader. The main bodies, theoretically, should have been placed so far back that they might concentrate by lateral movements, without the demoralising process of retreating, as soon as the commencement of the invasion indicated the point or points at which concentration was necessary. Obviously, the longer the frontier, the greater would be the space to be

traversed in concentrating, and therefore also the distance behind the frontier at which it could be done. In other words, the necessity of watching the whole frontier carried with it, as in Belgium in 1815, the necessity of abandoning to the enemy without resistance a certain breadth of territory, and the risk that the troops posted in front to retard the attack might suffer severely in their inevitable retreat. The Russian frontier being much longer than the Belgian, the territory necessarily to be abandoned was much greater, though, the country being difficult instead of open, slighter proportional resistance would avail to delay the enemy while the main armies concentrated. On the other hand the Russians, being greatly outnumbered, needed what they would gain from the purely military point of view, whatever they might lose in other ways, by this preliminary retreat being a long one. Every stage of advance diminished the invader's resources, by lengthening the line of communications which he had to guard, and over which he had to convey all he required ; while every stage of retreat brought the Russian armies nearer to their reserves. There were other points, however, to be taken into account, considerations rather political than military. The whole of the frontier region, having been recently Polish, was known to be more or less ready to welcome the invader. As a matter of fact Lithuania did at least profess to welcome him, though the people exhibited very little zeal in his cause. Doubtless they were bitterly disappointed at Napoleon's not proclaiming the kingdom of Poland, and also crushed, like the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, by the burden of his endless requisitions. At the end of the campaign we find Napoleon[1] complaining of so little having

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,372.

been done for him by the Poles. Nevertheless at the outset the Russian Government had to calculate on the wholesale defection, not of Lithuania only, but of the other Polish provinces also. This certainly supplied a motive for abandoning as little as possible of a region which would serve the enemy with alacrity. If the theatre of war could have been regarded solely as a chessboard, without any reference to political considerations, the Tzar should have accepted the Dwina-Dnieper line as his first line of effective defence, and have contented himself with merely impeding in every way Napoleon's advance across Lithuania. This would of course have been a great sacrifice, both as being a confession of weakness in the eyes of Europe, and as facilitating the dreaded reconstitution of Poland. As events turned out, he would have gained on the whole by so doing. He was obliged to retreat so far without a great battle ; his armies suffered materially, and his Empire was discouraged by the spectacle. And as Napoleon, for his own reasons, did not proclaim the restoration of Poland, he did not elicit the zeal in his favour which the Polish provinces of Russia might in that case have displayed. Given however that the Tzar could not bring himself beforehand to abandon these provinces without a struggle, he had practically no choice but to place the head-quarters of the largest army at Vilna. Clausewitz and others say, with perfect truth, that it was much too near the Niemen ; but Lithuania being such as has been described above, there was literally no other place between the Niemen and the Dwina which could serve the purpose, and it was also the capital of the province. The result was disastrous, as all the stores accumulated at Vilna were lost to the Russians; but loss in one way or another was inevitable.

At the beginning of 1812, when war was certain, but nothing had yet occurred to indicate either its date or the line of invasion, or the attitude to be assumed by Austria, the Russian armies intended for active defence were necessarily spread widely over the frontier, one large corps in Courland, two in Lithuania, others in Volhynia and Podolia. When the French began moving towards the Vistula, the Tzar organised these troops in two main armies, the larger of which, under Barclay de Tolly, the War Minister, had its head-quarters at Vilna, while the second, to which were now added two divisions withdrawn from the Danube, had its head-quarters at Lutsk, near the north-eastern corner of Galicia. By the end of May, Napoleon's masses had advanced to about the line from Königsberg to Warsaw, but there was nothing except the Austrian contingent south of Warsaw. This indicated with sufficient definiteness that the main invasion would be made in the natural direction,[1] across the Niemen. About the same time the Tzar received the communication from Austria already referred to,[2] and it may be assumed that the assurance of having nothing to fear from across the Austrian frontier had its weight in determining the ultimate arrangements for awaiting attack. A portion of the second army was separated from the rest, and placed under the command of Tormazov, for the defence of Volhynia against the anticipated attack of Napoleon's extreme right wing. Prince Bagration, with the remainder of the second army,

[1] Napoleon did his best to create the belief that he was personally going to Warsaw, so as to suggest that his chief attack would be directed on Bialystok or Brest-Litovsk. This was a very natural device to adopt, but the Russians seem to have been too well informed to be deceived by it.

[2] See p. 37.

was ordered to move about one hundred miles northwards, and place himself at Pruzhani, north-east of Brest-Litovsk, while the corps which had formed the left of the first army was put under his command. A little later, when the French were ascertained to be massing opposite Kowno, this corps was drawn in nearer to Vilna and reunited to the first army, Bagration being again shifted northwards to Wolkowisk.

Thus at the outbreak of hostilities the Russian forces were posted as follows:—The first army, with its head-quarters at Vilna, had two corps, the 3rd (Tuchkov) and 4th (Shuvalov), between Vilna and the Niemen, and one, the 2nd (Baggovut), behind the great westerly bend of the Niemen north of Kowno. The 5th corps, consisting of imperial guards under the Grand Duke Constantine, was placed as a reserve at Sventsiani, north-east of Vilna, while Dokhturov's corps, the 6th, formed the left wing, in touch at Lida with Bagration's army. The two cavalry corps forming part of this army were placed, one at Smorgoni, east of Vilna, the other in rear of the 2nd corps. Finally, Wittgenstein with the 1st corps was at Rossiani, north of the westerly part of the Niemen's course, and was intended to act with a certain independence as the detached right wing of the army.

It was perhaps a last exhibition of the easy-going optimism which led some of the Tzar's advisers to underrate the difficulties of the position, that the main body of Cossacks, under their Hetman Platov, was posted at Grodno, so as to strike at the right flank and rear of the invaders. The army of Bagration, it was hazily supposed, would be able to support the Cossacks, and threaten to intercept Napoleon's communications. The French numbers were, however,

large enough to enable them to be superior at all points, and Platov was obliged to share in the general retreat. The vagueness characteristic of the Russian schemes of defence was very conspicuously shown in relation to the Cossacks. In a loose and general way it was held that they would be of great service against an invader, but there was no clear conception of what they could, and could not, be expected to do. They were not really equal on the battle-field to regular cavalry, and should never have been set to do its work. At the same time they might have done much in harassing Napoleon's lateral communications, and so delaying his advance, which was apparently not attempted. The time for the Cossacks was perhaps not yet come; before the tide turned against the French their proper functions were more clearly seen, and they became invaluable.

The second army, consisting of the 7th (Raevski) and 8th (Borozdin) corps, was posted at Novi Dvor and Wolkowisk, opposite the space between Grodno on the Niemen and Brest-Litovsk on the Bug, with its cavalry corps a little east of Wolkowisk, and a screen of Cossacks extending from Bielsk to Brest-Litovsk. Reinforcements for the second army were on their way, but were not nearer than Minsk. Finally the third army under Tormazov, which was considerably dispersed, had its head-quarters at Lutsk.

This distribution of the Russian forces was probably as good as could be made under the very unfavourable conditions. The third army sufficed to hold in check Napoleon's extreme right throughout the campaign, though not without some vicissitudes of fortune. The first and second armies were doomed to inevitable retreat as soon as the invasion actually began, but for the present they held possession of

Lithuania. The Tzar, who had been at Vilna since the end of April, was under no illusion on this point. The whole of the first army had been warned that they would have to retreat before the invaders, and the point of concentration named, Sventsiani, a little way east-north-east of Vilna, nor did the presence of the army immediately under Napoleon's eye prevent this from taking place. Until however Napoleon should commit a definite act of war, the Russian armies remained quiescent, and peace nominally subsisted, though communications across the frontier were completely stopped.

CHAPTER V.

FIRST STAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN.

Napoleon's scheme of invasion was in its main outlines dictated by the most obvious considerations of convenience and strategic propriety. Unless he had deliberately resolved to adopt a plan less advantageous in itself in order to take his enemy by surprise, it could hardly have been different. While the Austrians on his extreme right entered Volhynia to face the detached army of Tormazov, which occupied that province, and the extreme left under Macdonald crossed the Niemen near its mouth and moved on Riga, the great bulk of the army, considerably over 400,000 men, was directed straight into Lithuania. Of this enormous mass the larger half, under the Emperor's own eye, was to be concentrated opposite Kowno, and make the first incursion on to Russian soil. Three corps, under the general command of Napoleon's brother Jerome, starting originally from Warsaw, were intended to encounter the second Russian army under Bagration.

Napoleon's strategy however was, as might be expected, of a higher order than merely driving back his opponents all along the line by the weight of double numbers. He proposed to hold back for some days after his own passage of the Niemen, both the second army, as the forces under Jerome may conveniently be called, and also the 4th corps

(Eugene), which formed his own immediate right, and therefore the connecting link with Jerome. The object of this was to prevent Bagration having any direct inducement to retreat simultaneously with Barclay. If the main French army, pushing Barclay before it, could advance for some distance before Bagration took the alarm, it would be virtually between the first and second Russian armies, while Eugene would be ready to stop any imaginable movement of Bagration threatening Napoleon's right flank. Then Bagration, assailed vigorously in front by Jerome, and on his right flank by Eugene, might be destroyed or driven so far to the south and east as virtually to count for nothing, and the task of overcoming Barclay would become correspondingly simple. This plan, as will appear, was only imperfectly carried out; nevertheless Bagration was unable to effect his junction with Barclay anywhere west of Smolensk, a result amply proving the soundness of the original scheme.

On the twenty-second of June, all being ready for the invasion, and he himself being at Wilkowisk within easy distance of Kowno, Napoleon issued a proclamation to his army, which was the first official announcement that war was impending. It was sent with careful instructions as to the exact time at which it should be published to the different corps, so that the Russians might be kept in ignorance as long as possible, and was in the following terms:—

"Soldats, la seconde guerre de la Pologne est commencée: la première s'est terminée à Friedland et à Tilsit. A Tilsit la Russie a juré éternelle alliance à la France et guerre à l'Angleterre. Elle viole aujourd'hui ses serments! Elle ne veut donner aucune explication de son étrange conduite

que les aigles françaises n'aient repassé le Rhin, laissant par là nos alliés à sa discretion. La Russie est entrainée par la fatalité : ses destins doivent s'accomplir. Nous croirait-elle donc dégénérés ? Ne serions-nous donc plus les soldats d'Austerlitz ? Elle nous place entre le déshonneur et la guerre : le choix ne saurait être douteux. Marchons donc en avant ; passons le Niemen, portons la guerre sur son territoire. La seconde guerre de la Pologne sera glorieuse aux armes françaises, comme la première. Mais la paix qui nous conclurons portera avec elle sa garantie, et mettra un terme à la funeste influence que la Russie a exercée depuis cinquante ans sur les affaires de l'Europe."

A more unfortunate document was perhaps never penned ; every statement in it was wilfully untrue, while the predictions were falsified by the event. This mattered little for the soldiers of the Empire, such as they had now become ; they were neither able nor willing to scrutinise the justness of their cause. They were quite content to trust Napoleon, who had so often led them to glory and plunder. It is however worth noting, as indicating what was in the Emperor's mind at the outset, that he calls it "the second war of Poland," and that he proposes no object to be attained beyond destroying Russia's influence in Europe. Such a prospect was hardly tempting to the soldiery, who must have been well aware that Lithuania was a poor country not worth plundering. If the idea of pushing his invasion home to the heart of Russia had been in his thoughts, he would surely have held up to his soldiers the glorious and profitable hope of occupying the capital of another great Empire.

By this time the 1st corps (Davout), 72,000 strong,

the 2nd (Oudinot), the 3rd (Ney), the imperial guard, and all the reserve cavalry were massed on the left bank of the Niemen, within a short distance of Kowno. The reserve artillery, the vast trains of ammunition and supplies of all kinds, were brought as near as was possible without interfering with the troops. Eugene with the 4th and 6th corps was also close up to the front, though not destined to move for some days. The second army under Jerome had been left as long as possible in the neighbourhood of Warsaw, in order to encourage the belief that Volhynia was to be invaded in force, and also to guard against any possibility of a counter-stroke by Bagration before Napoleon was quite ready. Hence it was not till the twenty-second that Jerome received orders to march north-eastwards, and place himself at Augustowo, west of Grodno, with the 5th and 8th corps, the 7th (Reynier) forming the connecting link between him and the Austrians on his right.

Early on the twenty-third of June, Napoleon personally reconnoitred the banks of the Niemen near Kowno. A Polish officer, Count R. Soltyk, relates in his memoirs how the Emperor alighted from his carriage at daybreak in the midst of the bivouac of the 6th Polish lancers; how he himself and others took off their uniforms on the road, and how Napoleon and his companions put on those which fitted them best, since French uniforms might attract the attention of the Russians. Riding forward a couple of miles to the hamlet immediately opposite Kowno, Napoleon surveyed the neighbourhood from the windows of the village doctor, and made minute inquiries about the topography, and especially as to the position of the Russian masses. On his return, "on lui apporta quelques rafraichissements, qu'il mangea au milieu de nous, sur la grande route; il

sembla prendre plaisir à son travestissement, et nous demanda, à deux réprises, si l'uniforme polonais lui allait bien. Après avoir déjeuné, il nous dit en riant, 'à présent il faut rendre ce qui n'est pas à nous.'" Then he resumed his own uniform, and went off hastily to reconnoitre at other places lower down the river. Having done this, he selected the points at which bridges were to be thrown, there being no bridge, nothing but a ferry, for the service of the high road. He was not yet aware that the Russians were merely observing the river with a cordon of light troops, their main body being withdrawn almost as far as Vilna. Hence his orders for the passage of the Niemen,[1] issued in the course of the day, were very elaborate; they imply that he expected serious resistance unless by extreme care the enemy could be surprised. The place selected was a bend of the river above Kowno, between the town and the village of Poniemon. At 10 p.m., the earliest hour at which it would be dark at midsummer, General Morand, with three companies of voltigeurs and some sappers, crossed the Niemen in boats, to protect the construction of the bridges, three in number, and about 300 yards apart. They were not all across, when a troop of Russian hussars rode up. Their commander asked in French, "Qui vive?" "France," was the reply. "What are you doing here?" "You will see," answered the French. Thereupon the Russians galloped off, after firing a volley from their carbines, to which no reply was made, the Emperor having given stringent orders that not a shot was to be fired without absolute necessity. By one o'clock the bridges were

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,857. These orders are an excellent specimen of the minuteness, sometimes overdone, with which Napoleon regulated every detail himself.

complete, and Davout's corps was marching across, rather to the surprise of the French, who had expected resistance.[1] In the forenoon of the twenty-fourth, the French occupied Kowno unopposed. Napoleon transferred his head-quarters thither, and caused a fourth bridge to be made at the ferry, and also one over the Wilia just above its junction with the Niemen.

All through the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth the vast masses were filing across the bridges; but though Napoleon remained in Kowno himself, the foremost troops were pressing forward rapidly on Vilna. Murat received strict orders to make sure that appearances were not deceptive, that the Russians really had no troops blocking the way except the light cavalry, whom he could easily drive off. The guard and Davout's corps followed; the leading divisions, making forced marches, covered the distance between Kowno and Vilna, little short of sixty miles, in three days. Simultaneously Oudinot had crossed the Wilia at Kowno, and moved north towards Kejdany, in the hope of cutting Wittgenstein from the main body. The latter, however, had received timely notice that the moment for retiring from the frontier had come, and Oudinot could do no more than press his retreat without intercepting it. On the twenty-eighth, outside Wilkomirz, occurred the first action of the campaign, which is barely mentioned by the sober Chambray as a rear-guard encounter of no importance, though Marbot, who took part in it, describes it in very glowing terms. According to Marbot,

[1] A letter from the officer of engineers who had charge of making the centre bridge has recently been printed: he says that all the time they were expecting Russian batteries to open on them, but that in fact only fifty or sixty musket shots were fired all night.

the French army generally, after the unopposed passage of the Niemen, imagined that the Russians would nowhere stand to fight, and Oudinot refused to believe Marbot's report that 30,000 men were in position before him, until the guns opened; then a brilliant attack routed the Russians, who fled through the town and over the bridge in confusion, Marbot's cavalry regiment breaking the infantry which attempted to cover the flight, and taking 2,000 prisoners. According to Buturlin, a rear-guard of 4,000 or 5,000 men, of which he gives the exact composition, did its natural duty in covering the retreat of Wittgenstein's corps through Wilkomirz, with a loss of eighty killed and wounded.[1]

The news of the passage of the Niemen having been begun reached Vilna on the evening of the twenty-fourth, and orders were immediately issued for the retreat of the Russian armies. The point of concentration named for the first army was Sventsiani, as previously arranged; the large body of Cossacks near Grodno was meant to be included, but was too far off, and ultimately had to share Bagration's fortunes. The stores accumulated at Vilna were all destroyed, including a large quantity of oats which would have been an inestimable prize to the French; and the bridge was broken down as soon as the troops on the west of Vilna had filed through the town.

Before quitting Vilna the Tzar issued a proclamation to his army, which affords so marked a contrast to Napoleon's that one is half tempted to imagine that he had already seen the latter, a thing not really possible. Alexander

[1] Marbot's memoirs have attracted so much attention from their lively style and outspoken character, that it seems worth while to give an idea of the amount to which his narrative needs to be discounted.

affirmed truly that he had no wish for war, that he had only armed in view of continually renewed acts of offence, and that the Emperor of the French had attacked him unprovoked. A letter was addressed on the same day to the governor of St. Petersburg, by way of manifesto to the nation, ending with the declaration, "I will not lay down my arms so long as a single hostile soldier remains on the soil of my Empire." That this was not a commonplace of the moment, but the Tzar's deliberate resolution, is attested by his language and conduct throughout the struggle.

Equally consistent with his previous attitude was his making a last effort to avert war by sending his aide-de-camp, General Balashov, to Napoleon with a communication to the effect that he was still willing to negotiate, but only if the French recrossed the Niemen. Napoleon refused to see Balashov until he was himself installed in the Tzar's quarters at Vilna. He then professed to consider himself insulted—at St. Helena he said that he deemed it a mere device to gain time—and sent the envoy back with a long letter recapitulating all his previous complaints. One Russian historian[1] says that Balashov was told, if Napoleon refused to listen, to warn him that the Tzar would neither make nor entertain any proposals for peace so long as there was one French soldier in Russia. Possibly he found no opportunity, for the French writers do not mention any such message being given. Certainly Napoleon took no heed; he had persuaded himself that his grievances were real, and he had as yet not the slightest doubt of being able to overcome Russia. To this interview belongs the story, which does not seem very well attested, but which if untrue is exceptionally *ben trovato*, that Napoleon in

[1] Danilevski, i. 140.

conversation at dinner asked the envoy a question about the roads to Moscow, to which the Russian replied that several roads led thither, one of them passing through Poltava.

The retreat, for which all the corps commanders were fully prepared, was carried out promptly and with fair success. By the evening of the second of July the whole first army, except a single detachment, had duly reached Sventsiani or its neighbourhood, Wittgenstein alone having had occasion to fight. The 6th corps however, coming from Lida, had had a narrow escape. Being at the greatest distance, Dokhturov both received his orders last, and had furthest to march; he had consequently not quite reached the Vilna-Minsk road when he heard that a large French force was approaching by that route. Dokhturov however was equal to the emergency: on the first of July his corps marched twenty-eight miles to Swir, thus escaping from the trap, and got into line with the rest on the second. On the other hand the rear-guard of the 4th corps, after waiting till the twenty-seventh for orders which by some accident never arrived, found itself cut off, and was obliged to work southwards and join Bagration. No attempt however was made to stand and fight at Sventsiani. Barclay was by this time fully aware that he could not cope with Napoleon's numbers, at any rate before junction with Bagration. The retreat was therefore continued without intermission to Drissa, where the whole army was concentrated on the eleventh of July, except Wittgenstein's corps, which crossed the Dwina a little lower down.

Napoleon arrived at Vilna on the morning of the twenty-eighth, where he remained for many days. Murat, with the cavalry and two divisions of infantry from Davout's corps,

kept up the pursuit of the retiring Russians, supported by Ney somewhat in rear and on his left, and also by Oudinot, who followed as before on the heels of Wittgenstein. Such a force was of course inadequate for seriously pressing the Russians, who retreated at their leisure. The fact was that Napoleon's gigantic undertaking was already showing signs of breaking down under its own weight. On the twenty-ninth of June a storm of unusual violence ushered in a spell of five days' rain, exceptionally heavy, apparently, for the season. The results were so serious that some writers, desiring to excuse Napoleon's ultimate failure, have spoken of this as the first and not the least important of the unexpected blows dealt by fortune. It is obvious, however, that bad weather was to be expected from time to time. This storm, though it doubtless caused some delay and suffering, did not stop the march of troops on either side that were on the move. The mischief done was in disorganising Napoleon's vast trains of supplies, following mainly the one line from Kowno to Vilna. The bad Polish and Lithuanian roads broke up immediately, the effect of the rain on them being equivalent to a sudden and violent thaw. The horses, none too numerous[1] for the work under favourable conditions, began to fail at once under the additional strain. The waggons, excellent on good roads, were many of them too heavy for bad roads with a soft subsoil. It would appear as if Napoleon had calculated on the horses being mainly fed from the country, or else he would not have laid stress[2] on the crops being grown, and that this expectation was not fulfilled. Moreover, fodder is

[1] Chambray (i. 162) expressly says that even the artillery was inadequately horsed from the first.

[2] Nap. Corr. 18,667.

the bulkiest of all supplies, and was therefore the most difficult to bring to the front. Hence the horses were badly fed as well as overworked, and began dying in great numbers. One eye-witness estimates the number of dead horses on the Vilna road alone at 10,000. The inevitable result was a lack of food for the soldiers,[1] with its natural consequence, pillaging to supply the deficiencies. The team drivers, who though under military control were not soldiers, and had therefore no hopes of glory and very few of booty, were both least amenable to discipline and probably most neglected in the matter of rations: hence they were the worst plunderers. Napoleon's orders were severe enough, but they were ineffective to repress the evil; men with arms in their hands will not starve if they can obtain food by force. It is not to be supposed that pillage was universal, or that the army had no other resources; but the evil was a permanent one, and did much to alienate the sympathies of the Lithuanians from Napoleon's cause. It was not that Napoleon, as his admirers foolishly imply, ignored the risk of bad weather; the mistake lay deeper, and was much more excusable. He was attempting an expedition of unprecedented magnitude, and had taken enormous pains to organise it, but he had failed to realise that its very size might produce new difficulties, or render the ordinary ones indefinitely more serious.

There was, however, a further reason why the pursuit of

[1] Napoleon very early confessed his failure. On the ninth of July he wrote (Corr. 18,932) severely reprimanding Poniatowski, commanding the 5th corps, for complaining that his men could get neither pay nor bread, adding that his guards had no bread, and were content to live on meat. This last statement was false (see Nap. Corr. 18,913), but the whole letter implies that he expected his troops to be able to do without rations when they were not served out.

Barclay was not pressed with the great strength which Napoleon's superiority in numbers seemed to invite. As soon as he had Vilna in his power, and was satisfied that the Russians were retreating further, he set about the second part of his original plan, the destruction of Bagration's army, or at least driving it far from the immediate scene of action. To this end Jerome coming from Grodno, Eugene with the flanking corps of Napoleon's army, and Davout despatched from Vilna along the Minsk road, were to co-operate; and Napoleon hoped that if Bagration had not taken the alarm he would be completely surrounded. The result showed the practical impossibility of accurately combining operations on so extensive a scale, when the chief who tried to direct them was two days' journey from his distant subordinate, and possessed of information naturally imperfect. To do thoroughly what Napoleon attempted would reflect great credit on a modern general armed with the field telegraph. The march of Davout's corps was begun under the Emperor's own eye. Eugene's command, the 4th and 6th corps, crossed the Niemen at Pilony, a little above Kowno, one of the pontoon bridges from Kowno, where a permanent pile bridge was now being constructed, being used for the purpose, and was hence directed on Novi Troki, near Vilna. The route was by mere tracks through forest and marsh, made worse by the rain; the men were half starved, for under such conditions no supplies could keep up with them, and the country was deserted. From Novi Troki they were sent south-eastwards on a report that Bagration was approaching, and easily recalled when it appeared that this was untrue. The failure of Napoleon's plan, so far as it was a failure, was in connection with Jerome's army, which was too far off for

him to control its movements in the same immediate way. Moreover the whole scheme was based on the assumption, a perfectly legitimate one, but obviously liable to be falsified by Russian action which he could not know, that Bagration with his separate army would not begin to retreat until he was pressed in front. Bagration in fact received from the Tzar orders to retire when the invasion began at Kowno, and this of itself disconcerted Napoleon's plan; but he is no more to be blamed for this, than he is to be praised because later orders nearly caused Bagration to walk into the net ingeniously stretched to catch him.

It has been mentioned that Jerome on the twenty-second of June received orders[1] to move from near Warsaw to Augustowo, which place he was to reach on the twenty-fifth. The order was practically impossible of fulfilment, the distance being about ninety miles; no doubt Napoleon was incorrectly informed as to distances.[2] Rightly or wrongly, Jerome, receiving these orders when still some distance from Augustowo, did not attempt to change his route and move straight on Grodno. The reason given by his apologist, Ducasse, that the cross roads were so much worse that nothing would have been gained by a slight shortening of the distance, may easily have been true. At any rate he reached Grodno and occupied it on the thirtieth without opposition, as he would have done some days sooner. Napoleon may have been over-

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,831.

[2] This derives strong confirmation from a despatch (printed in Ducasse, 115) written by Berthier to Jerome two days later, in which he says that the Emperor, assuming him to reach Augustowo on the twenty-fifth, wishes him to attack the enemy at Grodno, if inferior in strength, that day or the next; now Augustowo is thirty miles from Grodno.

cautious in leaving the second army close to Warsaw till the twenty-second, but as he had done so it was impossible that it should also occupy Grodno on the twenty-sixth. On the twenty-ninth Berthier wrote from Vilna, telling Jerome that there were no longer any troops in Volhynia, and that Bagration's army was at Ochmiana: he was therefore to march on Ochmiana. The next day was sent another despatch, bidding him move on Minsk, and to send Reynier towards Nesvizh, "ne perdant pas de vue de couvrir Varsovie?" If Jerome had acted on the first of these orders, he would have marched away from Bagration; for they were sent in the belief that Dokhturov's corps, which as has been said came through Ochmiana just then and narrowly escaped from Davout, was Bagration's army. If he had immediately obeyed the order to move on Minsk he would have pressed Bagration most awkwardly. Jerome however lingered at Grodno, and lost two or three precious days. His excuses, as put forward by Ducasse, were the weather, which however bad did not prevent other troops from moving, and the absence of the 7th corps (Reynier), without which he did not deem himself strong enough to cope with Bagration, whose numbers he supposed far greater than the reality. The two excuses are obviously inconsistent, but the latter at least was real. Reynier was in fact delayed by the slowness of the Austrians on his right; he had been expressly told that his first duty was to cover Warsaw until the Austrians took his place. On the day on which Jerome received the last orders, Reynier also wrote from sixty miles off to say that he could not reach even Bialystok for two days more, as he had to bridge the Narew, the Cossacks having removed all boats. If Napoleon had been on the spot he would perhaps have risked a

Russian dash on Warsaw, and he would have known the other movements ordered for trapping Bagration. Jerome however did not know the latter, while he did know, what Napoleon did not, of the Austrian tardiness, and he was also better informed as to Bagration's real position, and as to the Russian forces in Volhynia. Waiting till Reynier was within reach, he moved east on the fourth of July, and reached Novogrodek on the eighth, just too late. The Emperor's combination had been made upon false information, but it would have succeeded, through the accident of Bagration having been diverted from his proper line of retreat by ill-judged orders from head-quarters, but for Jerome's delay. Napoleon was much vexed, and vented his rage upon his brother in two letters,[1] which the editors of his Correspondence thought fit to suppress. He never accepted any excuse for lack of implicit obedience, and he had on this occasion some grounds for displeasure; but he was himself partly to blame both for attempting to direct complicated manœuvres at so great a distance, and also for entrusting command to a man who could not judge unerringly which of two conflicting orders was the important one to execute. As the result, Napoleon transferred to Davout the command of the army acting against Bagration, and Jerome went home in disgust.[2]

Meanwhile Bagration, who like the other Russian generals had received timely notice to retreat, need never have been in danger but for the vacillation in the imperial councils.

[1] Lettres Inédites, 932 and 933; printed also by Ducasse.

[2] So much has been made of Jerome's failure and disgrace, from various points of view, that I have described the facts at possibly greater length than they merit, though they illustrate very aptly a difficulty of warfare, permanent and insuperable before the invention of the electric telegraph.

It was realised at once that the notion of striking at Napoleon's flank as he advanced on Vilna was under the conditions absurd; and the original order was that Platov, with his Cossacks from near Grodno, should retire *viâ* Lida and Smorgoni to Sventsiani, the place of concentration of the first army, while Bagration was merely warned not to let himself be cut off from Minsk. Leaving Wolkowisk on the twenty-eighth, he calculated on reaching Minsk by the seventh of July. Two days later, however, very different orders arrived; the Tzar's advisers, conscious that Barclay without Bagration could not fight with any hope of success, summoned Bagration also to Drissa. A glance at the map is sufficient to show that this was impossible, with Napoleon in great strength at Vilna, unless by a *détour* through Minsk, for which place he was marching; and this ought to have been obvious at the Russian head-quarters. Bagration, probably ignorant of the risk he was running, obeyed, and on the fourth of July had thrown two bridges over the Niemen at Nikolaev, when he heard the alarming news that Platov had been stopped by Davout's corps, and was at Wologin, not many miles in front of him. The original strength of Davout's corps was well enough known to the Russians, and Bagration had no means of knowing that nearly half had been detached. His own army was in fact somewhat superior to the force in front of him; but Jerome with fully equal strength was approaching, and indeed but for the delay at Grodno would have been close at hand. Bagration saw that his only chance was to decamp up the left bank of the Niemen, and try to reach Minsk by the Slonim road. Leaving Platov, just then joined by the rear-guard of the 4th corps under Dorkhov (which as before related had been unable to reach its proper destination),

to hold Wologin against Davout for three or four days, he pushed with all speed for the Minsk road. At Mir, however, he learned that Platov had been unable to hold Wologin, and that Davout was approaching Minsk. To attack Davout, his superior in strength as he imagined, would be madness; victory would only push Davout back towards Vilna, and defeat would mean ruin: he must make the *détour* by Nesvizh and Bobruisk, and so reach Mohilew. While Bagration halted at Nesvizh to rest his weary troops, and give time for his trains to reach the Brest-Litovsk-Bobruisk high road, Jerome's advanced cavalry had two sharp encounters with the Cossacks posted at Mir to cover Nesvizh. These were both to the advantage of the Russians, but Bagration knew better than to follow up success of that kind, and continued his retreat as rapidly as possible. It is a singular illustration of the effect produced in war by imperfect information that both sides, during this episode of the campaign, thought the enemy much stronger than he really was. Bagration supposed that Davout had 60,000 or 70,000 men, while both Davout and Jerome supposed Bagration to have at least that number, which was far above the truth.

Napoleon had plenty to occupy him during his stay at Vilna. Jomini says that he had four objects in remaining there—first, to know the result of the operations against Bagration; second, to bring his magazines from Königsberg; third, to organise the government of Lithuania; fourth, to give time for Eugene's two corps to come into line. The first is no reason at all; the more closely he pressed Barclay, the more completely he would separate him from Bagration. The fourth is a reflection on his own deliberate

action in holding Eugene back. The second was the real reason, rendered more urgent by the effects of the rain. Vilna was chosen at the outset as the main depôt for everything, largely because it was accessible by water,[1] thus partially relieving the roads; and this involved some fortification both of Vilna and of Kowno to guard against a sudden attack. After the invading army reached Smolensk, the road *viâ* Minsk to Warsaw was used for some time as the main line of communication, but the relics of the Grand Army escaped at last through Vilna and Kowno. The imagination refuses to give a distinct meaning to long lines of figures; all it can do is vaguely to picture the mountains of food, clothing, ammunition, etc., requisite for half a million of men, with perhaps as many beasts.[2] And yet all was inadequate. It is probable that Napoleon had provided enough, but the supplies could not be kept within reach of vast masses of troops on the move. Lithuania was not only eaten bare, everything in the country within reach of Napoleon's columns was destroyed; soldiers who have to maraud for their bread, as most of them from time to time were obliged to do, invariably acquire habits of destroying whatever they do not carry away.

The organisation of Lithuania is spoken of by many writers as if it had been a vast administrative creation. Napoleon, with his inexhaustible capacity for work and love of detail, was no doubt equal to the task; he despatched from Vilna a whole sheaf of decrees regulating small matters

[1] Chambray (i. 193) gives the details of the water carriage from Königsberg.

[2] The numbers of horses given by Chambray and others as belonging to the Grand Army include only those for strictly military use; they take no account of the supply teams, and there were also endless droves of bullocks for food.

in France.[1] In fact, however, he merely set up at Vilna a provisional government consisting of a few of his partisans, nominated, or caused them to nominate, governors (whom he naturally called by the French titles of *préfet* and *sous-préfet*) over the districts and sub-districts into which Lithuania was already divided, and placed soldiers in each to keep order. The duties prescribed[2] were purely those resulting from military occupation, and in no way tended to improve the condition of the inhabitants; indeed the merciless pressure for supplies and for enlistment[3] reduced them to abject misery. Napoleon on entering the country had announced that he came to bring liberty to the people, but there were few among them to whom the word had any real meaning. The peasants, who had always been serfs, interpreted it as license to refuse all obedience, and to plunder their masters, which naturally alienated the nobility, and frightened the Jews, who filled such towns as existed and almost monopolised trade. And though Napoleon was severe in repressing disorder, this did not avail to gain him the confidence of the nobles. These had no material reason to complain of Russian rule; none but the old remembered the days when Lithuania was part of Poland. Many were real partisans of Russia, many more regarded with just terror the prospect of a French occupation; and though many doubtless desired the resuscitation of Poland, they soon

[1] *Gazette Nationale* for 1812. tenth of July, etc.

[2] Nap. Corr. 18,939.

[3] The first act of the provisional government was to order levies of some 12,000 men for Napoleon's service; in a few days the Emperor made a requisition for 4,000 horses, and for an indefinite number of draft oxen (Fain, i. 256). Other demands followed. It is impossible to tell accurately how many were in fact supplied, but Napoleon's Correspondence contains many complaints that Lithuania does not furnish him with troops.

lost all zeal for a conqueror who burdened the country beyond its strength, and refused to promise anything definite in return.

It may reasonably be presumed that the zeal of the Lithuanians in Napoleon's favour, never very general or eager, was also damped by the reception given by him to the representatives of the diet at Warsaw. An account has already been given[1] of the manner in which Napoleon ordered beforehand, in all its details, the so-called spontaneous movement of Polish patriotism. The Archbishop of Malines had carried out his instructions to the letter, and had succeeded, to use Napoleon's own phrase, in plunging the nation "dans une sorte d'ivresse." The Polish provinces of Russia indeed could not be roused to general insurrection, and Galicia was not allowed the chance of showing its sentiments. In the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, where the Polish cause was almost universally cherished, enthusiasm ran high, and De Pradt had rather to moderate than to stimulate. The diet, which began its session on the twenty-sixth of June, proclaimed a confederation of all the former provinces, declared the kingdom of Poland re-established, and summoned all Poles to desert the Russian standards. All this was in exact accordance with Napoleon's own programme as given to De Pradt; he knew that otherwise he should not get the support in men and supplies which he desired. So also it was in the programme that the diet should approach Napoleon with an address stating what had been done and begging for his protection. Finally, it was in the same programme that he should reply by snubbing their aspirations. It is a misrepresentation, pardonable in the earlier writers who

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,734; see p. 43.

had not full access to Napoleon's Correspondence, but wilful in Thiers, to say that the zeal of the Poles outran their discretion, and that it embarrassed the Emperor because of his relations to Austria. He had calculated it all out beforehand; the unfortunate Poles were skilfully guided along the prearranged path, when they thought they were following the dictates of their own patriotism. Yet perhaps even Napoleon felt a touch of shame and reluctance when his unconscious tools presented to him their touching request: "Sire, say the word only, say that Poland exists, and it will be equivalent to the reality." He replied, however, in the tone indicated to De Pradt nearly two months before—vague expressions of sympathy, a prediction that if all the provinces formerly belonging to Poland show the same zeal as Warsaw, Providence will crown their cause, but not a word committing himself to aid it. Whether Napoleon outwitted himself, or whether he obtained by this unworthy manœuvre the maximum of Polish support attainable under all the conditions, may perhaps be doubted. What is certain is that he deliberately and heartlessly traded on the patriotic feelings of a gallant people.

The Russian army had scarcely reached Drissa before proposals for abandoning it were mooted. The camp itself was, as has been said, ill placed on general military principles, and the existing state of things made matters worse. By the account of Clausewitz, who had been sent just before to make a special inspection, though the works were good in themselves there were no subsidiary defences, and the bridges[1] essential for communication with the right

[1] Either these bridges were completed during the next fortnight, or Buturlin (i. 194), who speaks of four bridges all protected by outworks, is describing what ought to have been, rather than what was.

bank of the Dwina were not yet made. Strategically the army could hardly be worse placed. It had retreated rather away from than towards Bagration, a junction with whom was essential. The position invited Napoleon to turn it, and either force Barclay to retreat into Livonia, where he would be useless, or else hold Barclay in check with part of the army, while he advanced unopposed into the heart of Russia with the rest. According to the sound judgment of Clausewitz, to remain at Drissa was certain ruin, and every day's delay increased the danger. In truth it was only Napoleon's halt at Vilna which saved the Russians from disaster.

Clausewitz paints in very lively colours the confusion reigning at the Russian head-quarters. So long as the Tzar was present in person, not only was Barclay de Tolly not supreme, but there was no calculating what influence might prevail. The Tzar had confidence in Phull, his instructor in strategy and the author of the camp at Drissa, but partly for this very reason nearly every one else disliked him. Barclay mistrusted him as a mere theorist, and was jealous of being virtually commanded by an inferior in rank. The native Russians were hostile to the foreigners, including even Barclay, who, though Russian born, was of Scotch extraction; the statesmen or courtiers were at odds with the mere soldiers; personal ambitions and rivalries were rampant. Equally discordant were the opinions as to the proper course to adopt. Phull was with difficulty induced to surrender his cherished device. Count Lieven, late Russian ambassador at Berlin, was full of the ideas there prevalent, presumably Scharnhorst's, and thought it a pity that a shot should be fired before reaching Smolensk. Barclay thought more retreat demoralising to his soldiery,

who had quite held their own in such rear-guard actions as had taken place, and would have liked to show fight more frequently. Fortunately for the Russian cause, the Tzar resolved to quit the army and attend to the pressing duties which called him to the centre of the Empire. This left Barclay really commander-in-chief; and as he had never believed in Drissa, and was most anxious for a junction with Bagration, it was immediately resolved to move up the right bank of the Dwina through Polotsk to Vitepsk, where perhaps Bagration might be met. Leaving Wittgenstein's corps behind to guard the road towards St. Petersburg, Barclay began his march eastwards on the fourteenth of July, protected by the river from any molestation by the French, who occupied the country nearly as far as the Dwina, though in no great force. On the eighteenth he reached Polotsk, none too soon, for Napoleon on the same day transferred his head-quarters to Glubokoie, nearly half way from Vilna to Vitepsk, his guard having arrived there two days earlier, and Eugene being by this time on the same line further to the south-east. The retreat was continued without intermission to Vitepsk, the whole army encamping about that town on the twenty-third. Barclay's hope was, according to Buturlin,[1] to march southward to Orsha on the Dnieper and there join Bagration. If he ever entertained this dangerous idea—for he would all the way have been risking attack in flank from very superior forces, unless Napoleon had been too far off to reach him—he abandoned it on finding that the French were already near him. He therefore on the twenty-fifth sent the 4th corps, now commanded by Count Ostermann, with some additional cavalry, to Ostrovno, on the way to Bechenkowiczi, now the

[1] I. 213.

French head-quarters, which is close to the angle of the great loop of the Dwina below Vitepsk. The country was favourable for retarding the French advance, being cut up by many ravines, rugged though not very deep, with occasional woods. Hence no great numbers could be brought into play at a time, and Murat's great superiority in cavalry availed only to prevent Ostermann's further advance, until reinforcements of infantry gave him at least equal numbers in that arm. Then Ostermann retired in good order, and the same game was played on the next day by Konovnitsin, who had relieved Ostermann during the night. Chambray blames the Russians for not having resisted more obstinately, the ground being favourable, but seeing that they were only driven back about ten miles in two days, and that they inflicted a fairly heavy loss[1] on the enemy, the criticism seems rather severe. Of course Napoleon could have overwhelmed them if he had chosen, but he was anxious to bring on a general action, and therefore told Eugene[2] not to press too rapidly, but to leave time for the last of Barclay's corps to reach Vitepsk, lest Barclay should have in its absence a motive for again retreating. In so doing Napoleon as a matter of fact lost an opportunity, but the calculation was not unreasonable.

A sounder objection to Barclay's generalship is that of Clausewitz, who calls it madness to have thought of giving battle at Vitepsk. Barclay, according to him, had had before his eyes, before quitting Drissa, the prospect of

[1] Buturlin (i. 220) is the only authority who gives figures: he says that the Russians lost about 2,500 men and the French 3,000, besides 300 prisoners; but some deduction should be made from the latter, which their enemies could not know accurately and would be likely to exaggerate.

[2] Nap. Corr. 19,010.

finding a good position near Vitepsk in which to fight a defensive battle. Reluctant to incur the loss, alike of territory and of *morale*, involved in a further retreat, and ignorant of the position of Bagration, whose latest instructions had been to make for Orsha, he actually took up a position for battle behind a little river which flows into the Dwina just below Vitepsk. To this position Clausewitz applies the strong epithet "detestable"; but if it had been the strongest imaginable, he ought not on any grounds to have fought a battle there against double numbers. Strategically the position could be turned by its left, which would mean that Napoleon cut Barclay off completely not only from Smolensk, but from Moscow. Politically the choice of evils was unmistakably in favour of incurring the losses implied in retreat, rather than of risking total destruction on a slender chance of victory. Fortunately for the Russians, news came just in time that Bagration was moving on Smolensk, so that a junction with him could not be effected sooner. Napoleon made sufficient demonstration of attack on the twenty-seventh to make sure that the Russian army was before him, but his troops were not quite near enough to admit of a general action being fought that day, and the chance was lost. The Russians retreated silently and expeditiously during the night, so that they were entirely out of reach before Napoleon's cavalry had been able to ascertain in which direction they were gone. Marching by three different roads, one of which at least was circuitous enough to suggest a doubt whether his purpose was not to cover the way to St. Petersburg, Barclay moved to Smolensk, where he concentrated on the first of August, the second army joining him two days later.

The escape of Bagration from the overwhelming forces

despatched by Napoleon to enclose him reflected credit on his prompt judgment in difficult circumstances, still more on the steadiness of his troops; but he was also aided by fortune. Saved by the tardiness of Jerome from being surrounded when he was obeying the call to move on Drissa, he had received important reinforcements through Platov being also cut off on his way north; the Cossacks contributed largely to the bold front he showed while making his necessary halt at Nesvizh, and covered his rear when he continued his retreat. Jerome did not reach Nesvizh till the thirteenth, and there gave up his command to Davout. Napoleon's order had been that when the corps under Jerome were united with Davout's force, the latter, as senior in military rank, should command the whole; and he afterwards reprimanded Davout[1] for doing this prematurely, when the 5th corps was still behind. The fault, if fault there was, lay with Jerome's not unnatural annoyance at his brother's language, for Davout could not help assuming the chief command if Jerome refused to go on with it. Moreover, when large armies are moving over considerable distances, 80,000 or 100,000 men are practically never concentrated on one spot unless for battle. The transfer of the command, however, did occasion some little delay, increasing Bagration's chances of escape, and Napoleon may be pardoned for visiting his displeasure on some one.

Giving up the direct pursuit of Bagration, Davout ordered Poniatowski and the cavalry corps (Latour-Maubourg) of the second army to march through Igumen to Mohilew, while the 8th corps was directed *viâ* Minsk on Orsha. His own corps was at the same time moving from Minsk to Mohilew, which was occupied on the twentieth, Grouchy's

[1] Nap. Corr. 18,984.

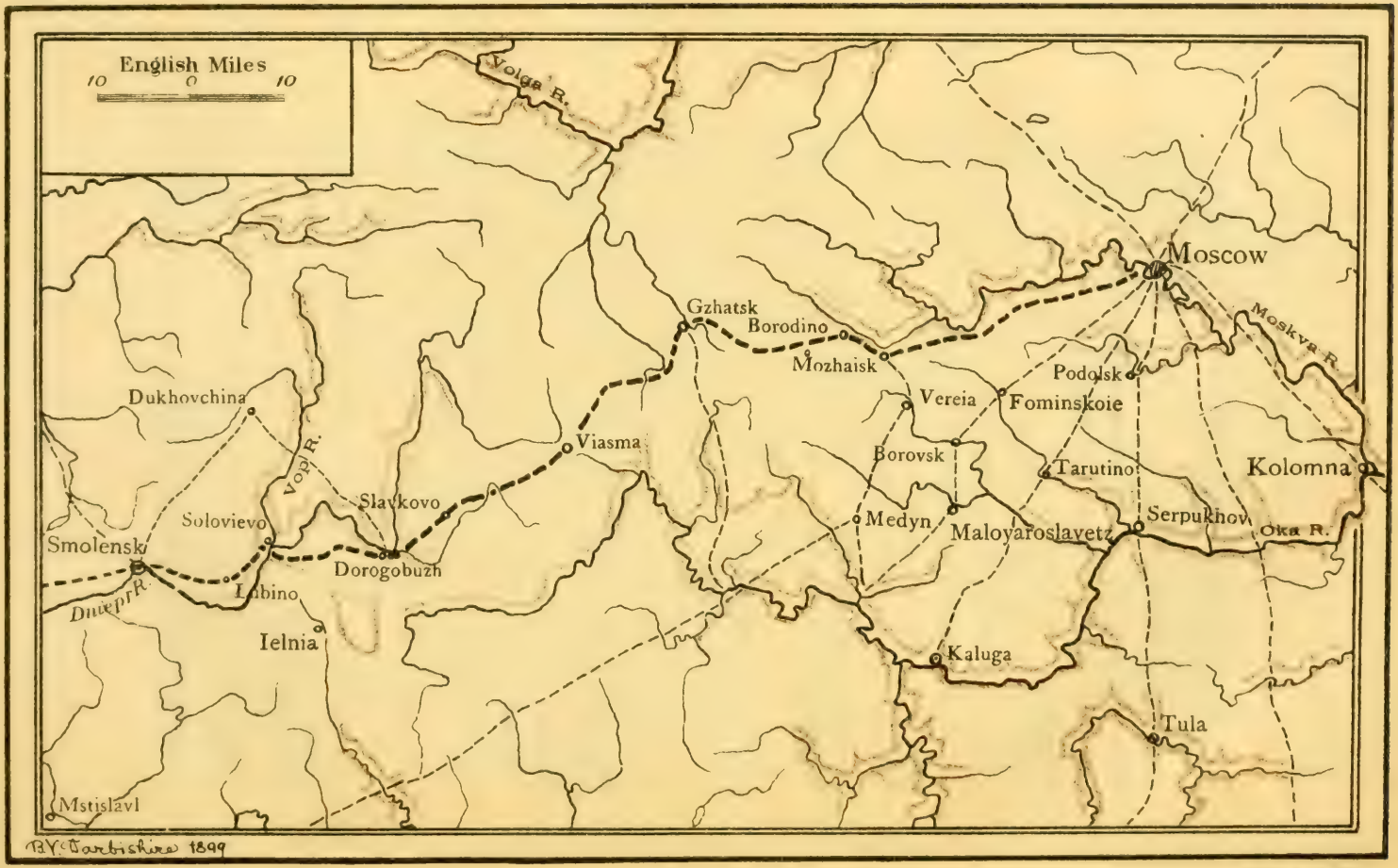
cavalry having previously taken possession of Borisov, expelling a skeleton garrison of 400 men. Before the French pursuit had ceased, Bagration heard of a hostile force some twenty-five miles north of Bobruisk. Apprehensive of being anticipated at that important point, he sent Raevski forward with all speed, while he himself with the other corps sustained the rear-guard. Bobruisk however was in no danger, and Bagration's army was concentrated there on the eighteenth. So far as actual distance went, Davout's corps might have reached Bobruisk from Minsk a trifle sooner than Bagration; but the place, being fortified, could easily have kept the French at bay until Bagration arrived, and the Russians, crossing the Berezina under the protection of the fortress, would have been safe from further pursuit. Davout therefore exercised a wise discretion in going to Mohilew, not much further from Minsk, seventy miles further on the route which Bagration must follow, and unfortified. At Mohilew Davout awaited Bagration, and was able to find a strong position on the Bobruisk road, which could hardly be assailed in front by large numbers. It could be turned on the right, but that was an alternative little tempting to the Russians, since failure would expose them to the loss of their line of retreat. This position was attacked on the twenty-third of July by Raevski, who, after some hard fighting and sundry vicissitudes of fortune, was repulsed. According to French accounts, Davout had only about 25,000 men at Mohilew, and of these many, from the nature of the position, took no part in the action. Raevski had rather less men, but he had of course the rest of Bagration's army to sustain him in case of need. It is an illustration of the dwindling of numbers inevitable in war, and specially noticeable in this

campaign, that Davout should have had only 25,000 available at Mohilew. Of the 72,000 that crossed the Niemen under his command, two divisions, say 28,000, had been temporarily given to Murat, and he had left detachments in Minsk and elsewhere that will account for some thousands more; but even allowing for these, the shrinkage is enormous in a corps which hitherto had not fought.

Bagration's generalship at Mohilew has been blamed, not without plausibility. It is said on the one hand that he ought never to have attempted to force his way through, seeing that Davout might easily have a considerable superiority in strength, besides the advantage of position. It is urged on the other side that if he had attacked with his whole force, approximately double Davout's, he would have been able to overcome all opposition. As to the former point, Bagration's whole disposition led him towards fighting rather than manœuvring, if the choice was open. As to the latter, critics forget that they know, what Bagration could not, the real strength of the army opposed to him. Nor is it clear that his apparent half measure was not the wisest course. If Mohilew proved to be held by a mere detachment, Raevski was amply strong enough to drive it out. If Davout was there in force, an attempt to cross the Dnieper, and make a circuit to the eastwards, might involve fighting at a disadvantage ; or Davout might also move eastwards and remain between him and Barclay. By accident or design, Raevski's attack served to prevent Davout from suspecting that Bagration was bridging the Dnieper at Staroi Bykhov, some distance to the south, until it was too late to molest him in crossing. On the day after the battle Platov's Cossacks, fording the river, made their

way northwards, out of reach of Mohilew or French detachments elsewhere, and joined Barclay on the twenty-ninth. Bagration went further east, as far as Mstislavl, and reached Smolensk without further molestation. Poniatowski did not join Davout till Bagration had obtained a good start, and without the reinforcement Davout could not attempt to intercept him again. Indeed it does not appear from Napoleon's Correspondence that the Emperor ever wished him to cross the Dnieper; instructions were given repeatedly as to securing Mohilew and Orsha, but none for going further. Gradually, when Napoleon was at Vitepsk, Davout's whole command, except sufficient detachments to hold the places in rear, was drawn up to Orsha, ready to take part in Napoleon's advance on Smolensk.

With the junction of Barclay and Bagration, and the reunion under Napoleon's immediate eye of all the troops which he could spare from the widely detached wings, the first period of the campaign came to an end. In it the Russians had suffered less than might have been expected, considering their vast inferiority in numbers, the wide dispersion of their armies forced on them by the necessity of the case, and the uncertain views or positive mistakes of their leaders. Napoleon's huge numbers were in themselves a cause of delay which partly nullified the advantage. The dispersion of the Russian armies signified the less, since both wings had in case of need open and safe retreat available, the right on St. Petersburg, the left towards the army just set free by the peace with Turkey. The Russian mistakes were neutralised by the slowness with which the Grand Army could advance, and the difficulty of combining operations over wide regions. The Russians in retiring were drawing nearer to their reserves, and to their resources



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generally. Marching through their own country, they had probably suffered less hardships than the invaders, and it would seem also that they had greater average powers of endurance. Buturlin gives the number of the two armies, when united at Smolensk, at 120,000 ; he makes them, before the campaign began, amount to 174,000. Of these, 25,000 had been detached under Wittgenstein ; 5,000 or 6,000 had been killed or wounded in the two actions of Mohilew and Ostrovno, and a number, impossible to estimate accurately, in the many small rear-guard affairs. This leaves no great margin for losses by sickness, straggling, etc.—less than 20,000 at most, or a ninth part of the original total. Napoleon in the same period had left behind over a third of his force. The various corps concentrated for the advance on Smolensk crossed the Niemen 301,000 strong : on the third of August the same corps showed a total of less than 194,000.[1] Detachments had of course been left behind to guard the communications, and losses possibly equal to those of the Russians had been incurred in action ; but these sources of diminution account for only a fraction of the whole. The difference must be attributed to sickness and to straggling. Lack of supplies[2] was the chief cause of both. The soldiers, subject to considerable fatigue under

[1] These figures are taken from a note in Chambray, i. 297. The numbers for the 8th corps and for one cavalry corps are given by estimate, all the rest from the field-states of the day : thus the possible margin of error is very small.

[2] It is scarcely possible to judge how far this was due to the inherent difficulties of the situation, how far to bad management. Napoleon was rather prone to expecting his officers to fulfil orders whether they had the means or not : and the generals in turn often treated their inferiors in the same way. Some, notably Marshal Davout, took excellent care of their men, but careful attention to administration was apparently by no means universal.

a hot sun, often got no bread. Though Napoleon gave orders for the construction of ovens at every fresh halting place, the supply was never adequate, and the men, foraging for themselves, were fortunate if they found grain, which they ate boiled for lack of mills to grind it. The meat of over-driven beasts is scarcely fit for food, the water of marshy districts is rarely wholesome, and the brandy to which the French soldier was accustomed, and which might have rendered the water less noxious, was seldom forthcoming. Hence there was much illness, chiefly dysentery, and as the country furnished no resources for hospitals, the sick fared badly. The straggling again, mainly due to the necessity of marauding in search of food, involved both loss of discipline and the sacrifice of additional troops employed to gather up the stragglers and compel them to rejoin the ranks. Thus the first six weeks of the campaign saw the balance shifted in favour of the Russians, in every respect save that they had been forced to evacuate the whole of Lithuania. And even this had its partial compensation in the fact that the population of Russia proper was bitterly hostile to the invaders, instead of being indifferent or more or less favourable to them.

Napoleon made a halt at Vitepsk almost as long as at Vilna, primarily for the same purpose, to bring up supplies of all kinds, but also to rest his troops and restore to the ranks as many stragglers and convalescents as possible. He had no longer any strategical reasons for speed of movement, such as had existed at first, when he was seeking to get every advantage out of the wide dispersion of the Russian armies. On the other hand, the summer was passing away, and little had yet been achieved. Either the halt at Vitepsk was in Napoleon's judgment indispensable, or he had not

yet before his mind the purpose of advancing to Moscow unless the Russians would allow themselves to be thoroughly beaten first.

During Napoleon's stay at Vitepsk events happened which compelled him to detach on each of his wings larger forces than he had before thought would be necessary; and affairs in both quarters assumed the condition in which they remained for months, until the tide was turning decisively in favour of Russia. On the right wing the original arrangement had been that Schwarzenberg, with the Austrian corps, should enter Volhynia, and hold in check, or drive back, the third Russian army. Jomini suggests that Napoleon expected the enemy's wings to share the retreat of the centre, as under more usual conditions might have been natural. If this was so, it is another evidence of the misconceptions which the unprecedented scale of the campaign induced even in Napoleon. Tormazov's force was in no sense a section of the main army; it was a separate army altogether, with a base in another direction, from which large supports might eventually be expected. His lack of preparation at the outset, causing him to remain stationary at Lutsk, lent credibility to the totally fallacious reports which reached Napoleon at Vilna, to the effect that there were practically no hostile troops in Volhynia. If this were the case, Schwarzenberg's large corps of over 30,000 men was wasted in that quarter; and Napoleon also, not without reason, imagined that Schwarzenberg was not too zealous. He therefore determined, in violation of the spirit, though not of the letter, of his treaty with Austria, to call Schwarzenberg up to the centre, where the corps would be under his own eye, and leave Reynier's Saxons, of little more than half the strength, to look after

Volhynia. Accordingly, when Jerome's army was broken up, Reynier was ordered back to Slonim, where Schwarzenberg then was, and the latter was told to move on Minsk, as a first step towards joining the centre. Reynier reached Slonim on the nineteenth of July; but two days before Tormazov had begun to show that the third army was a reality, not a myth.[1] After leaving detachments along the frontier, he advanced from Lutsk with over 40,000 men, part on Brest-Litovsk, which he occupied, part on Kobrin, where he surrounded Reynier's advanced guard on the twenty-seventh and destroyed or captured the whole. The French general, who had been moving to meet Tormazov, could only fall back and ask for help from the Austrians, which was given, Schwarzenberg informing Napoleon that Reynier could not possibly be left to stand alone. The Emperor was hard to convince of the necessity,[2] but assented to Schwarzenberg's moving towards Volhynia, and placed the 7th corps under his orders, as it remained to the end. Tormazov did not press Reynier, but, placing his main body at Pruzhani, made reconnaissances towards Warsaw and Bialystok, which terrified the Poles considerably, and brought Loison, the governor of Konigs-

[1] According to Buturlin (ii. 67), Tormazov advanced on receiving positive instructions from the Tzar to act on the original scheme, and make a diversion threatening Warsaw. He does not say that Tormazov was waiting for orders; but whether by accident or design, his intervention in the middle of July was much more effective than if he had taken the field three weeks earlier.

[2] Chambray (i. 209) quotes his words, to the effect that he could not believe that there were more than 8,000 or 9,000 bad troops in that quarter: but he does not say whence the quotation is taken. There is nothing of the sort in the published Correspondence, but that is very far from proving that Napoleon did not use the language attributed to him.

berg, with 10,000 men, half-way to Bialystok, to support the right wing in case of need. When Schwarzenberg joined Reynier, Tormazov again fell back before them, but on the twelfth of August stood to fight at Gorodeczna, half-way between Pruzhani and Kobrin, where the road passed through a marsh. He committed the fault of not ascertaining that the extensive woods on his left were passable, and was surprised accordingly. Schwarzenberg, however, had made the mistake of not perceiving that the narrow and difficult passages through the marsh could be guarded by a few men, as the Russians could not make a counter-stroke. Hence the flank attack was not made with the strength that Schwarzenberg's superiority in numbers would have allowed, Tormazov not having his whole army at hand, and the Russians escaped serious disaster. Tormazov however was obliged to retire beyond the river Styr, and Schwarzenberg did not think proper to assail him, his function being to hold Tormazov in check. This deadlock in fact lasted for a considerable time, to the satisfaction probably of both commanders.

On the extreme left Macdonald with the 10th corps advanced in a leisurely manner towards Riga, and prepared to lay siege to it; but it is hard to see what service, proportionate to his numbers, Macdonald was supposed to be rendering. His corps was neutralised until near the end of the campaign by enemies of about half its strength. Macdonald's operations were however in a sense isolated. The real left wing of the Grand Army was the force detached to make head against Wittgenstein, whom Barclay in marching from Drissa to Vitepsk had left behind to cover St. Petersburg. As the French corps following Barclay made their way up the other bank of the Dwina, Napoleon

halted Oudinot's corps at Polotsk, that he might face his old opponent. This corps, originally 37,000 strong, if it had dwindled in the same proportion as the rest, was little if anything stronger than Wittgenstein's, which had been reinforced up to about 25,000. Thus equally matched, the two generals fought out a little campaign of their own, with much bravery on both sides and considerable alternations of fortune, each in turn advancing rashly and suffering at the hands of his adversary on the defensive. As the result Oudinot found himself still at Polotsk, and Napoleon, thinking him not strong enough, sent to his support St. Cyr with the 6th corps (Bavarians), now reduced to about 10,000 men. By the help of this reinforcement, Wittgenstein's last advance on Polotsk was repelled, after smart actions on two consecutive days, in the first of which Oudinot was badly wounded. St. Cyr thus won the victory, and received as a reward the Marshal's bâton which he had earned long before, though his success through lack of cavalry only amounted to compelling the enemy to retire in good order. Thus the French left wing, like the right, had to be left somewhat more numerous than the Russians opposed to it, while the centre made the advance which it was hoped would lead to decisive triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

SMOLENSK AND LUBINO.

Napoleon might have made a longer halt at Vitepsk if the Russians had been content quietly to await him at Smolensk. On the sixth of August, however, a council of war was held at which it was unanimously agreed to assume the offensive, and try to take advantage of the wide dispersion of Napoleon's army. Accordingly on the seventh the Russians moved in three columns towards Vitepsk, sending also Neverovski's division down the Dnieper to guard the left flank. This movement, if pressed vigorously by the whole available strength of the Russians, must have achieved some measure of success, for Davout was with the 1st, 5th, and 8th corps at and about Orsha on the Dnieper, and Napoleon had only within immediate reach the 3rd and 4th, with the guard. He would therefore have been compelled to retreat in order to effect a junction with Davout, to the great detriment of his arrangements for supplies. This advantage could only have been temporary, for Napoleon's total forces so outnumbered the Russians that they must have retreated again, or risked a great battle against odds. It is doubtful, however, whether they were well informed as to Napoleon's numbers. On the assumption of something like equality having been reached, the opportunity was favourable for that counter attack on the invaders for which the Russian armies had been hoping all through their long

retreat. Fortunately perhaps for them, Barclay at the end of the first day received information which led him to believe that Napoleon, or at least a considerable section of his army, was moving *viâ* Porietchie to the north of him, and thought it more prudent to take up a position facing in that direction. The advanced Cossacks, not warned of this, pushed on nearly to Rudnia, and encountered with success some French cavalry. It is probable that this gave to the French the impression that the whole Russian army was moving straight on Vitepsk, as in fact had been intended; for Napoleon issued orders setting all his forces in motion. Finding soon that no serious attack was impending, he resolved to move the corps under his own eye across to the Dnieper, where the right wing already was, cross to the left bank, and approach Smolensk by the Minsk road. Bridges were thrown across the river at and above Rasasna, by which Ney, Eugene, and the guard passed on the thirteenth, preceded by the cavalry, while Davout, Poniatowski, and the 8th corps, now placed under the command of Junot, moved up the left bank.

This very complicated movement was carried out with accuracy and promptitude in Napoleon's best style, and has received high praise accordingly. Buturlin even speaks of it as one of the finest manœuvres of the campaign. Writers however who look beyond the movement itself to the purpose it was to serve, condemn it strongly, and with reason. Clausewitz, going to the root of the matter, points out that Napoleon's one object was to bring the Russians to a decisive battle, and that Smolensk was of very secondary consequence. Barclay's advance gave him in fact the opportunity he wanted, always supposing that he did not move so rapidly as to compel Napoleon to fight without Davout. Even had

Barclay remained in Smolensk, Napoleon's best line of action was to advance to Porietchie; then Barclay must either fight, or abandon Smolensk, or allow himself to be cut from Moscow. The utmost that could result from Napoleon's move to beyond the Dnieper was his anticipating Barclay at that city, and this in face of the relative distances was scarcely possible.

On the afternoon of the fourteenth Murat at the head of the cavalry reached Krasnoe, where was Neverovski's division. The regiment that actually held the little town was driven out by the leading division of Ney's corps, which was next behind Murat. Then Neverovski began slowly to retreat, harassed incessantly by Murat's overwhelming cavalry. Forming his infantry into hollow squares, within which his handful of cavalry could find protection in case of need, he steadily followed the Smolensk road. Luckily for him, though the country was open, the high road was bordered for a long distance by beech trees, which afforded considerable protection both against the French artillery and against Murat's repeated charges. By nightfall he had lost about a quarter of his original 6,000 infantry and several guns, but he had kept the French at bay, and the next day he continued his march to Smolensk, supported by a division which Bagration had sent somewhat tardily to his relief. It is probable enough that if Murat had been content to wait for infantry, Neverovski would have suffered much more heavily; but his feat is a vivid illustration of the best quality of the Russian soldier, steadiness of resistance to the most formidable attack. In these days of long rifle range it is treated almost as an axiom that infantry, unless surprised, can beat off any cavalry; but infantry armed with muskets were fairly often broken by cavalry charges well led.

On the fifteenth Napoleon received intelligence to the effect that the Russians had abandoned Smolensk three days before. This news, which was probably a perversion of the fact that Barclay had marched out some days earlier, was the very reverse of the truth. Part of Bagration's army was already back in the city, the remainder was at hand, and Barclay, who had been slow to believe that the whole French army was really gone beyond the Dnieper, arrived on the sixteenth, soon after Murat and Ney had made their appearance before the walls. The city of Smolensk, a place of special sanctity in the eyes of the Russians, stands on the south bank of the Dnieper, and is surrounded by low heights, which more or less command it, rendering the position very unsuitable for a fortress. Indeed its appearance was rather ecclesiastical than military, and perhaps more picturesque than either. Its many churches, each with its five little cupolas gilt or painted, rose amidst trees, for most of the houses in the inner city stood in their own gardens. In 1812 there was a population of about 20,000, including the suburbs, while the walls had a circuit of over three miles, and the entire place of nearly five. There was an ancient brick wall, over thirty feet in height, and from sixteen to eighteen feet thick, which was so far from being adequate as a modern fortification that it was not even so constructed as to carry cannon. Seventeen towers, of very various shapes and dimensions, projected at intervals, and were supposed to strengthen the defence. Some of them were ruinous, but others had been adapted for artillery, and so furnished a certain amount of flanking fire.[1] As a matter of fact the towers were much less massive than the

[1] Chambray (i. 312) says that the Russians had only fifty guns available for defending Smolensk, and these without carriages.

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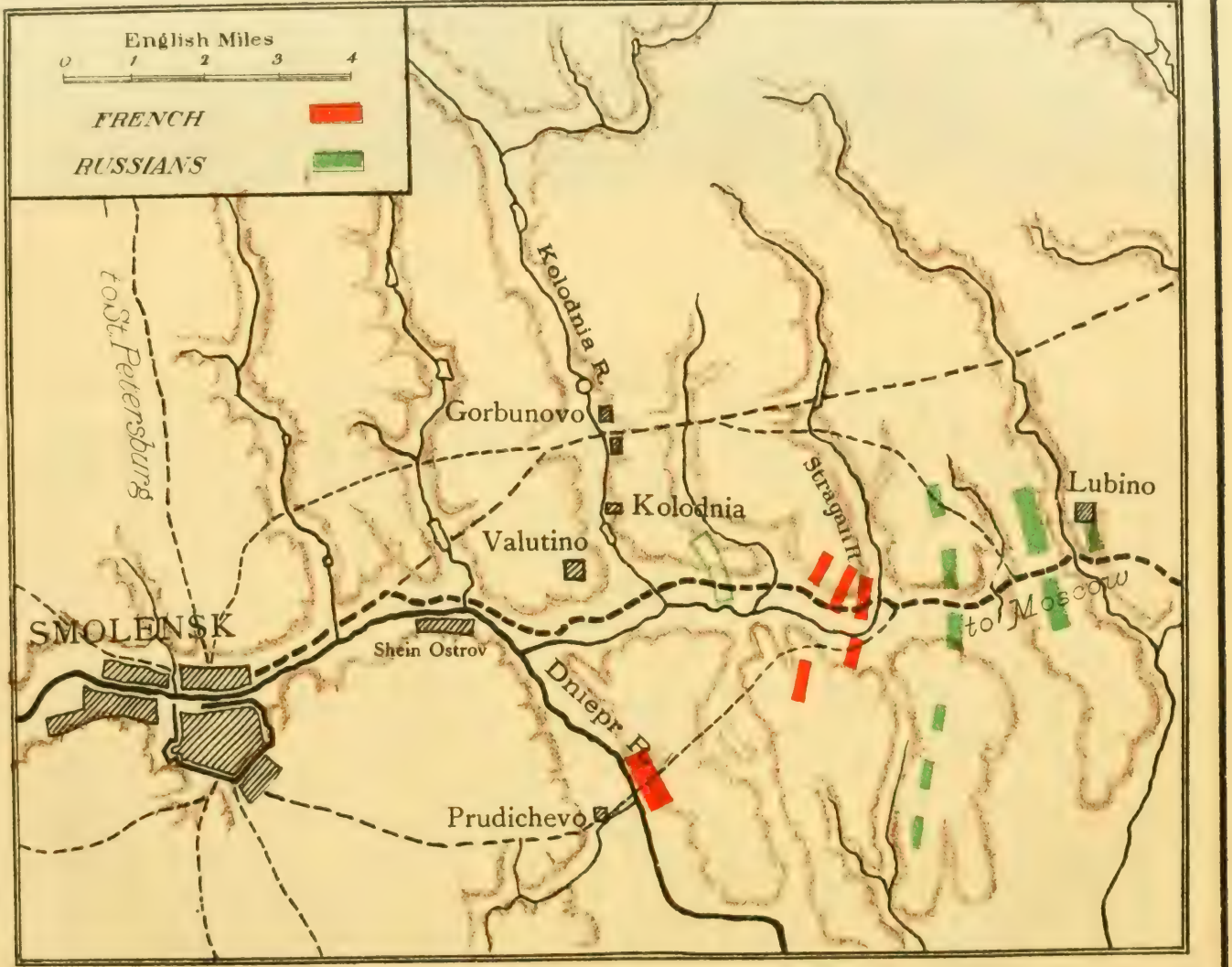

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walls, and might have crumbled under artillery fire, if the French had only known it. There was a ditch with the usual covered way and glacis, but in very bad condition, and at the south-west corner a small regular fort, intended as a citadel, but so badly constructed of earth that it was really the most vulnerable point. Along the Dnieper there were neither towers nor ditch: in the centre of the river front was one of the main gates, leading to the great wooden bridge. All round the city were suburbs, consisting chiefly of poor wooden houses. As these would have afforded shelter to the assailants, and enabled them to bring their guns up to the very edge of the glacis, it was practically necessary for the Russians to occupy them. And since the walls were so ill-fitted for active defence, it may almost be said that it was in these suburbs alone that the Russians could really fight: if once driven within the city, they could do little more than passively sustain bombardment. North of the river was a large and populous suburb, out of which ran the high roads, eastwards to Moscow, northwards to St. Petersburg, the former close along the river for a couple of miles, the latter ascending to a plateau which commanded the town. On this plateau Barclay's army was placed on its arrival, the city itself being occupied by Raevski's corps, belonging to Bagration's army.

Napoleon, reaching the front about an hour after Ney's corps, ordered an immediate attack on the citadel, the so-called Royal bastion, the earthen face of which was so dilapidated that it was possible to ascend it. Raevski was able to repel this, and within an hour the rest of Bagration's army had reached the town, and all fear of a successful *coup de main* was averted. In the course of the sixteenth the entire French army, except Junot's corps, which was

accidentally retarded, took up positions in a semi-circle round the south of the city, but no further attack took place. The Russians after the arrival of Barclay, seeing that only a comparatively small part of their force could be used for the actual defence of the city, resolved that Bagration should move a little way out on the Moscow road, while Barclay took charge of the defence. Accordingly Raevski in the night rejoined Bagration's army, which at daybreak on the seventeenth started eastwards, leaving a rear-guard at Sheïn Ostrov, two or three miles from the city, where the Dnieper was fordable, just opposite the extreme right of the French position. Dokhturov's corps, strengthened by Konovnitsin's division, replaced Raevski in the city, and early on the seventeenth drove the French outposts from the southern suburbs. It is probable that this forward move on Dokhturov's part, which was partly at least dictated by the state of the city walls, which Napoleon obviously could not know, led the Emperor to suppose that the Russian army was coming out to fight him under the walls. Otherwise it is difficult to see how he could have expected them to take such an obviously dangerous step without any necessity. For once the superiority in military skill was decidedly with his opponents. He could not have failed to be aware that a considerable Russian force had moved eastwards: it was inconceivable that they should have done this had there been any idea of fighting a pitched battle, seeing that Napoleon was visibly stronger than Barclay and Bagration united. That very move eastwards showed what the Russians were most afraid of, Napoleon's right being thrown across the Dnieper above the town, so as to cut them from Moscow. Nor has any military critic doubted that this would have been his best

course, when once he had taken up a position south of Smolensk. It would have compelled the Russians to evacuate the city, or to retire weakened by the garrison left within, and most probably would have forced them back towards the north. Nor was it conceivable that any commander would throw away the advantage which Dokhturov possessed of standing on the defensive with satisfactory cover, and advance into the open to attack a superior enemy posted on higher ground. Against modern artillery the suburbs of Smolensk could not have been held an hour; even in 1812 they might have been soon rendered untenable by a steady cannonade. The only explanation of Napoleon's ordering an infantry attack, when after several hours' waiting he found that the Russians did not come out to be killed, is that he was eager to come to close quarters, and so confident of beating the Russians under any conditions that he never expected an obstinate resistance.

At 2 p.m. the French attacked all along the line, and after two or three hours of desperate fighting obtained possession of the southern suburbs. The Russian cavalry on the east of the city were defeated earlier, and sixty guns were brought forward and massed on high ground near the river, whence they could partially command one of the temporary bridges. They were however held in check by Russian[1] artillery, for Barclay had placed batteries both above and below the city to take in flank the assailants at either end of the semi-circle, and they soon abandoned the attempt to destroy the bridge. Master of the suburbs, Napoleon brought forward artillery to batter the walls; but

[1] Sir Robert Wilson, who was with the Russian army on his way from Constantinople to the Tzar, says (Invasion, p. 87) that he pointed out the proper place for these guns.

field guns could make no real impression upon the solid brickwork, and renewed infantry attacks could lead to no result. At nightfall, when the action ceased, the Russians were able to reoccupy the covered way, and thus guard against a nocturnal surprise. The city however was on fire in every direction, the house roofs being chiefly made of wood: if they had been as close together as in most walled towns, the city must have been abandoned sooner. The losses on both sides had been heavy in proportion to the numbers actually engaged. The Russians had only 30,000 men in Smolensk, while more than double that number were brought into action on the French side. Chambray admits a French loss of 12,000 men, while the authorities on the Russian side estimate it at 20,000. Conversely the Russians admit a loss of over 6,000, while Chambray asserts that they suffered as heavily as the French. From the nature of the conflict—an attack from the open on defenders well sheltered—the French must have lost many more than the Russians in the infantry attacks, though the balance may have been partially redressed by the evening cannonade, which the Russians could not return effectively. On the whole it is probably safe to infer that Smolensk cost Napoleon from 12,000 to 15,000 killed and wounded, against 8,000 or 9,000 on the Russian side. But since many of the Russian wounded perished in the burning city, the permanent loss to each side was probably nearly equal.

Nothing could have been gained to the Russians by defending Smolensk further, even if the conflagration had not rendered it virtually impossible. They had fought Napoleon at last, under conditions which made serious defeat impossible, and had thus brought the strength of the two armies appreciably nearer to equality. But the curse of

half-heartedness still clung to the Russian counsels. In the night Barclay evacuated Smolensk, and removed the bridges over the Dnieper, but he kept his army on the high ground to the north of the city, instead of marching off at once, as he might have done, in the direction of Moscow.

It has been sometimes said that Barclay retired northward from Smolensk, while Bagration retired eastwards, in order that the roads to both capitals might be guarded until it should appear towards which Napoleon intended to advance. There is, however, no solid ground for imputing to Barclay this purpose, which would have been running a needless risk, since Napoleon could not have moved towards St. Petersburg with the united Russian armies ready to take him in flank. It is much more probable that his object was to leave Napoleon as long as possible in complete uncertainty as to the Russian plans—an end which he certainly attained. He did not however realise that this could be done with a fairly large rear-guard, enough to make a show on the ground visible from the city, since the French could not cross the Dnieper in force until bridges were available. The mistake was tactical, not strategical: but the risk incurred was enormous. Partly through this unnecessary retention of so large a part of his army before Smolensk, partly through grievous delay in the execution of his orders for retreat, Barclay found himself compelled to fight a desperate battle before he could again unite with his colleague.

Early on the eighteenth the French took possession of the city, occupied only by soldiers too badly wounded to be removed, and by such of the inhabitants as had found no opportunity to escape, or had clung despairingly to

their homes. Napoleon had the most obvious and urgent motive of self-interest for saving as much as possible of the city, beyond the natural promptings of humanity; and the French soldiers laboured assiduously to extinguish the flames, while the remnant of the inhabitants were assured that the invaders had no wish for their destruction. Not unnaturally, seeing what happened later, French narratives of the campaign asserted that Barclay had deliberately destroyed Smolensk, in order to prevent its serving the enemy. There seems, however, to be no reason whatever for believing this to have been the case. The sentimental motive, of not abandoning without a struggle a place held specially sacred, undoubtedly weighed somewhat with the Russians; but it must have been obvious that they thereby risked very serious injury, if not total destruction, to the city. As a purely military measure it was an act of dubious wisdom, though justified by the event. The enemy need not have attacked the place at all, and if he had not, the Russian army would have lost a move in the game: as it was, they gained one. Smolensk was more or less destroyed by Napoleon's cannonade, as an inevitable result of his accepting the challenge offered by the Russians continuing to hold it. It was an ordinary incident of war: the Russian general no more deserves praise for his patriotism, or blame for his vandalism, according to the point of view, than Napoleon deserves credit for magnanimity in preserving for his own use what could be saved from the flames.

Time was obviously necessary for restoring the bridge before Napoleon could make any serious attack on Barclay, whose army remained in view all day on the open ground to the north. A body of French cavalry forded the river

early below the bridge, and attempted to press the Russians, but was easily driven back by Barclay, whose rear-guard under Korf continued to hold the northern suburb. Some part of the infantry of Ney's corps was gradually taken across the Dnieper in rafts and boats, but it was not until 4 p.m. that Korf was compelled to abandon the suburb, after setting it on fire. Meanwhile Barclay had made up his mind to do the right thing, but it was no longer possible to do it without difficulty and loss. The Moscow road for a mile or two out of Smolensk lay close to the right bank of the Dnieper, and Barclay deemed it impossible to run the gauntlet of the French artillery which was, or might be, posted on the higher left bank, so as to command the road. He therefore waited till evening, and then sent about half his army under Dokhturov to make a circuit of about thirty-five miles into the Moscow road at Solovievo, some thirty miles east of Smolensk. Dokhturov's column, which comprised the corps farthest from Smolensk, and practically out of sight of the French, started at 7 p.m., there being no obvious reason why they should not have moved off in the morning. At 9 p.m. Barclay led the other half of his army by a cross road which runs due east from his position through the hamlet of Gorbunovo, and descends into the Moscow road at Lubino. The distance was only some twelve miles,[1] but the road was very bad and intersected by deep ravines, and progress was necessarily slow. In fact the delays were so continual that the hindmost division, that of Duke Eugene of Wurtemberg, was unable to start

[1] These distances are given by measurement from Buturlin's maps, but the cross roads may have been more devious than is indicated. Sir R. Wilson, who was on the spot, makes the distances much greater.

till 1 a.m. Moreover the darkness caused mistakes, and some part of the troops early next morning were only a mile or two north-east from the northern suburb of Smolensk. On discovering this, Barclay ordered Duke Eugene, with part of his division, to hold his ground there, saying that the fate of the whole army depended on his doing so. Korf's rear-guard, which had maintained itself outside the suburb till dawn, had retired northwards according to orders, to follow the bulk of Barclay's troops through Gorbunovo. They at any rate would be cut off if the French were able to press forward in force.

Barclay had committed another mistake early on the eighteenth, in instructing Bagration to march towards Moscow, leaving behind him only a rear-guard of Cossacks. It is quite obvious that if Barclay's army lying north of Smolensk was going to circle round into the Moscow road, the French, who had a much shorter distance to traverse, must be kept at bay somehow, until the movement was completed. Bagration on the morning of the eighteenth was in fact very nearly in the proper position for the purpose, and ought to have remained there while Barclay moved round behind him. Possibly the explanation is that Barclay did not anticipate until later any difficulty in making his own retreat by the direct way. At any rate, he awaked before starting to the knowledge that four regiments of Cossacks would not suffice to prevent the French from anticipating him at Lubino; and he therefore ordered Major-General Tuchkov, brother of the commander of the 3rd corps, to make a forced march with three regiments of infantry, a battery of horse artillery, and some cavalry, in order to reinforce Bagration's Cossacks.

Napoleon during the eighteenth had doubtless plenty to

occupy him, though it does not appear on the face of his Correspondence, which is a blank for the day, except one short note to Maret,[1] announcing the capture of Smolensk, that contains nearly as many incorrect statements as lines, one or two of which at least he must have known to be false. If he really believed what he told Maret, that the Russian army was marching towards Moscow "*fort mécontente et très découragée*," he may well have thought it needless to watch their movements closely. Anyhow it is clear that he had no idea of the opportunity given him through Barclay's inaction and Bagration's premature retreat. Otherwise he would surely have sent Junot across the Dnieper at Prudichevo on the eighteenth instead of the nineteenth, and Poniatowski might easily have followed. Fortunately for the Russians their enemy missed his chance, and it was not till the morning of the nineteenth that Napoleon set his army in motion. No written orders for this day happen to have been preserved except a despatch from Berthier to Ney,[2] dated Smolensk, 8 a.m., after receiving Ney's report of his first coming in contact with Russian troops, and one from Napoleon,[3] directing where Davout's corps is to place itself at an hour not specified. The former however shows conclusively that nothing was contemplated beyond the ordinary keeping in touch with a retreating enemy; in it Ney is even told to send cavalry to Rudnia, in order to make sure that the enemy is not blocking the way to Vitepsk.

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,098. On the letter is a note that Napoleon threw himself on his bed immediately after dictating it, and consequently it was sent unsigned.

[2] Printed in Chambray, iii. 388, and also in Fain.

[3] Nap. Corr. 19,104.

The battle of the nineteenth is one of the two most critical points in the campaign, and well deserves careful explanation. The French accounts are all completely at fault about the topography, naturally enough in a foreign country with a language practically unknown to the invaders, and rendered inevitable by the Russians having carefully cut the names and numbers from the verst-posts.[1] It was probably through error that the French gave to the battle the name of Valutino, a village lying three or four miles west of the field; the Russian name, Lubino, is far more appropriate, since the purpose of the battle was to protect that place with its cross road, and their final position was immediately covering it. Allowing for this source of error, there is no substantial difference between Chambray's narrative and Buturlin's, though Vaudoncourt's is rendered so incorrect as to be scarcely intelligible. The Russian is very precise in his statements as to localities and times, and also as to the Russian troops successively brought into action. His plan also agrees with the comparatively recent government map of Russia in all topographical details. I have therefore followed his narrative as to the course of events except in one particular, and have based the appended plan upon that in his atlas. The first position taken up by Tuchkov is indicated in skeleton only; the later position, and the French assailing it, are given in the usual way.

At what exact hour the French began to move on the nineteenth does not appear; certainly it was early enough have enabled them to checkmate Barclay had they known their opportunity. The movements ordered were exactly those natural to a general who knows only generally that his enemy is retiring. Grouchy's cavalry was sent

[1] Clausewitz, 180.

northwards on the St. Petersburg road, Murat eastwards on the Moscow road, while Ney's corps moved between them, in a direction which would enable him to support either in case of need. Grouchy was apparently so far held in check by Platov, whom Barclay had left behind with a large body of Cossacks to cover his retreat, that he was unable to effect anything. Murat soon encountered Bagration's Cossacks, and apparently did not press forward. Ney almost immediately found himself in contact with Eugene of Wurtemberg, and some obstinate skirmishing ensued. Had Ney received orders to press vigorously whatever Russians he encountered, he might have overwhelmed Eugene's little force, or compelled it to make a premature retreat. Fortunately for the Russians, he, like his master, had no inkling of the true state of affairs, and Eugene was able to hold his ground till Korf was safe, when by Barclay's orders he retired towards Gorbunovo to another position,[1] from before which Ney was presently recalled by Napoleon to take the direct Moscow road.

This skirmishing, whatever its exact locality, was a prelude on a smaller scale to the serious conflict on the Moscow road which occupied the rest of the day. While it was going on, Tuchkov had reached the Moscow road, about half-way between Valutino and Lubino, some three miles west of the latter, which was the essential point to

[1] This account is taken from Eugene of Wurtemberg's memoirs. Buturlin says that Ney had reached Gorbunovo, thus cutting off Korf, when Barclay ordered Eugene to retake Gorbunovo and hold it till Korf was safely past. The difference is rather as to the topography than as to the facts: and Eugene's version, while in no way more creditable to himself or to Barclay, seems the more probable, besides being a matter within his own knowledge. Moreover if Ney had once gone so far as Gorbunovo, he would not have been so easily recalled.

be guarded. He could now venture to rest his troops, who had been on the move for nearly twelve hours,[1] and went forward in person to join the Cossacks under Karpov, Bagration's rear-guard, and discover what the enemy was about. He soon found that they were approaching by the high road in considerable strength, and also that a bridge was being thrown over the Dnieper down to the left at Prudichevo. Accordingly he drew up his little force across the road, protected on the flanks by some bits of wood, with his solitary battery of horse artillery on the highest spot of the road, enfilading it for a considerable distance, pushed the Cossacks out in front of his left to watch Junot's bridge, and calmly awaited attack. Before it came, the leading corps of Barclay's column had passed Lubino, and was on the high road towards Moscow; the 3rd corps was following the same course, except that General Tuchkov had detached a couple of regiments to reinforce his brother. Baggovut however, delayed by the combat with Ney, was still far off, and Korf again behind him. It was therefore necessary for the high road to be defended for some hours longer.

At 10 a.m. Ney's column appeared in front of the Russians, and immediately began the attack. As Ney was considerably stronger than the force which Tuchkov then had on the field, and was moreover supported by Murat with a large body of cavalry, it may be safely inferred that the marshal would have made more impression on the Russians had he supposed that his task was important.

[1] No better illustration of the delays incidental to night marching, over roads that are mere tracks, can easily be found. Tuchkov had had no enemy to encounter or even to dread, and yet he had accomplished less than a mile an hour.

The ordinary duty of following up a retreating enemy is not one which justifies a great expenditure of men, unless the enemy are already badly beaten and the pursuers are so situated as to be able to press them hard. The Russians, conscious how much was at stake, held their ground obstinately, and Ney failed to drive them back. All this time Junot's corps was passing the Dnieper, and establishing itself opposite Tuchkov's left flank. Chambray relates that during the first stage of the battle, though he does not mention the hour, Murat went in person to urge Junot to attack, and received the answer that he could not, his orders being to take up a position immediately after crossing the river. Junot's conduct was probably prompted by dread of not implicitly obeying Napoleon, like Grouchy's on the day of Waterloo, and there was enough marsh in his front to render the task of assailing the Russian left a difficult one. It is obvious that he could have made victory certain, if he had accepted the responsibility, then or later in the day, of moving without orders; but seeing that Napoleon was within a few miles, it may fairly be asked why the orders were not given. That Napoleon in his bulletin blamed Junot severely proves nothing; he never omitted to cast upon some one the blame of every failure to attain complete success. In truth the Emperor was as little aware as any of his subordinates of the importance of the issue; it was only the combative instincts of Ney, awakened by the unexpected stand of the Russians, which converted into a serious battle what might otherwise have been little beyond a reconnaissance.

After five hours of fighting, Tuchkov thought it necessary to retire. He had doubtless lost heavily in proportion to his small numbers, and Junot might at any moment

advance, and soon render his position untenable. He therefore took advantage of a lull in the action, possibly when Ney was vainly waiting for Junot's co-operation. About a mile in rear was the last position available for covering Lubino, partly behind a little rivulet called the Stragan. At this juncture Barclay, arriving with further reinforcements, including some much-needed artillery, assumed the command. On the right and centre the new position much resembled the previous one. The high road passing over a rise in the ground, the artillery could be posted to command it, and there were woods which gave some shelter a little way north and south of the road, with marshy ground partly covering them in front. It was necessary however to hold a much longer line, since the ground rose again to the south, and the enemy could from thence have rendered the whole position untenable. There were marshes between the left and the Dnieper which afforded some protection, but these were not impassable, and if Junot had pushed forwards in earnest the Russians must have been driven off, probably with very heavy loss.

Napoleon gave clear proof of the lack of importance which the day's fighting had in his eyes by never visiting the scene of action. In the afternoon he betook himself, says Chambray, to a plateau north of the high road, and about a league in rear of the Kolodnia streamlet,[1] where Davout's corps was waiting till Ney should clear the way in front. At this spot the Emperor was found about

[1] Chambray, like other French writers, supposes that the Russian front was covered by the Kolodnia, instead of being three miles to the east of it. Hence it is doubtful where exactly Napoleon was, but probably it was the first high ground so situated east of Smolensk.

3 p.m. by Ney's message asking for reinforcements. One does not see why Ney did not simply ask that Junot might be ordered forwards, instead of begging for direct assistance. Napoleon, says Chambray, unable to comprehend what was happening, thought that the whole Russian army might be in position, and therefore ordered Gudin's division of Davout's corps to reinforce Ney. If he had really supposed anything of the kind, he would either have sent forwards Davout's whole corps, or he would have ordered Ney to hold his hand, the day being far advanced, and have prepared for an attack in full force the next morning. Simultaneously he sent to recall Morand's division, that had moved off by a cross road, which cannot be identified through the French confusion about the topography, but which it was assumed would take him round the right of the Russian position. The message found Morand struggling through a piece of primeval forest by a track so narrow that the artillery had to go forwards more than a mile before the guns could turn. Chambray laments this recall of Morand, as having saved the Russians from complete defeat. In another hour, he says, Morand would have emerged on the high road in rear of their position. If he had done so, he would have been destroyed or captured, for he would have come into the middle of Barclay's army; but seeing the difficulty of the ground, it is more probable that he would have been benighted long before gaining the Moscow road.

At five o'clock Gudin's division reached the front, and was immediately ordered to attack by the line of the high road, under a storm of artillery fire, the Russians having now eight more guns available. Gudin was killed, but his troops pressed forward all the more ardently, and made a

serious impression on the Russian centre; but Barclay had reinforcements within reach, and in turn repulsed the French. Murat's cavalry attacks on the Russian left met with the same fate, some success at first, but ultimate failure to obtain any permanent advantage. Ney renewed his efforts again and again, both along the road and towards the woods lying to the south of it. Against a last furious charge made by Gudin's division Tuchkov led his men in a counter charge, and the troops really crossed bayonets, a thing more often talked of than done. Tuchkov himself, though successful, was unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the enemy. By this time it was nearly dark, and the action soon ceased, leaving the Russians in possession of the ground, and the whole of the long column safely on the Moscow road. Indeed a very large part of it had been drawn into the action, or was placed in reserve, ready to be brought forward if necessary.

Buturlin gives in minute detail the names and strength of the infantry regiments which took part in the successive stages of the battle. According to him, Tuchkov sustained the first shock with only 2,400 infantry, besides cavalry, who, though fairly numerous, did not from the nature of the ground have much fighting. Subsequent additions brought the total up to over 15,000 infantry, and towards the end there was also at least that number in reserve. The French had certainly a larger force engaged, though it is impossible to obtain accurate figures; and Junot's corps of about 10,000 ought to be reckoned in, neither more nor less than the Russian reserves. The proportion of loss was, as might be expected, extremely heavy. Buturlin admits that the Russians lost 5,000, Chambray that the French lost 5,000 or 6,000, each estimating the enemy's

loss as greater; at the least, each side lost nearer a third than a quarter of the men actually engaged.

The French writers, except the honest Chambray, speak of the battle of Valutino, or Lubino as the Russians call it, as a brilliant victory. The French generals had allowed themselves to drift into a serious action, desperately contested in its last stage, for no adequate reason, and their master never corrected their blunder; in fact he shared it, for he reinforced Ney while never ordering Junot to move.[1] They had failed, in spite of repeated efforts, to drive the enemy from his position: they had suffered very heavily: if this be a victory, words have no meaning. It is true that the enemy after the battle abandoned the position, but he had by that time thoroughly attained the object for which alone it had been assumed. The credit, however, for the Russian success is not due to the general; as often happens in war, the valour of the soldiers, aided by the enemy's fortunate ignorance of his opportunity, retrieved the commander's error. Tuchkov first, and afterwards Barclay himself, conducted the action with skill and pertinacity, but it ought never to have been necessary to fight it. The importance of the battle may be estimated by considering what Napoleon might have done had he known early on the nineteenth how Barclay's army was moving. He could certainly have destroyed Tuchkov's command, perhaps the whole of Barclay's right column, for neither Bagration nor Dokhturov was within reach to render

[1] In a letter of the twentieth (Nap. Corr. 19,106), finding fault with the lack of promptness in sundry matters, he says there surely must be wounded to bring away after the advanced guard engagements of yesterday! Even in his bulletin, dated on the twenty-third, though he claims the battle as a glorious and complete victory, there is no trace that he knew what the real issue had been.

assistance. At the best Barclay could only have retreated northwards with scattered fragments of his force: Napoleon could have reached Moscow without the slaughter of Borodino.

At 3 a.m. on the twentieth, according to Jomini,[1] Napoleon appeared on the battle-field. Why he had not come there twelve hours earlier, or why he should have come in the middle of the night after all was over, are questions easier to ask than answer. He made no attempt to press the Russians, who resumed their retreat at daybreak, but contented himself with reviewing the troops and distributing rewards after his usual manner, and then returned to Smolensk. The fourteenth bulletin, in which he described the battle for the benefit of Paris, ranks high for shameless mendacity even among Napoleon's performances.

Napoleon had now reached the goal which he had originally proposed to himself. It is certain that he had contemplated advancing no farther than Smolensk in the first campaign. His own invariable language is confirmed by many indirect indications, so that it cannot be supposed to have been used to conceal his real purpose. Events had however turned out differently from his calculations: the enemy had not allowed himself to be drawn into a pitched battle, and was indeed far more nearly a match for the invader than he had been on the frontier. Under these conditions the plan of campaign must be altered, and there could be no real doubt what the new purpose should be. The Lithuanians had not answered Napoleon's very sanguine expectations: his Correspondence is full of complaints as to the remissness of the provisional government, and his own

[1] Life of Napoleon, iii. 377.

inability to draw any resources from the country. Cossacks[1] swarmed in his rear, and molested, though they were not nearly strong enough thoroughly to intercept, his communications on which everything depended. To stay at Smolensk under these conditions would be almost as difficult as to advance. To retreat would be an open confession of failure, and might probably cause his whole dominion in Europe to crumble away. The boldest course was also the wisest—in fact, was his only chance of safety. He must continue to follow up the main Russian army until he could bring it to a decisive battle, or force it to abandon the ancient capital. In that case the Tzar would surely give way, and peace would be won at the sword's point. The two eminent strategists who were eye-witnesses of the campaign, Jomini and Clausewitz, both thoroughly approve Napoleon's resolution, though most writers, like his generals at the time, think it was rash and ill-judged. That so desperate a venture should have become necessary after an advance hitherto only delayed, not really resisted, by the enemy, is the best proof that the whole scheme of invasion was too unwieldy to work.

There is no positive evidence to show at what date Napoleon made up his mind to push for Moscow. He certainly gave no intimation of it until he was in possession of Smolensk; but this may have been, as Jomini suggests, in order to stimulate his army by the near prospect of reaching the end of their labours. The battle of Lubino

[1] I have not been able to discover any definite information as to these Cossacks, and how their proceedings were directed. It is plain however that they contributed, far beyond their numbers and value on the battle-field, towards weakening Napoleon's main army, by compelling him to leave very large detachments to guard his communications.

implies nothing: from Napoleon's point of view at the time it was merely an unexpected incident occurring in the ordinary observation of a retiring enemy. It could not have been until late on the twenty-third of August that Napoleon heard of Barclay having halted near Dorogobuzh, with apparent intention of offering battle. It is therefore impossible to infer, as some writers have done, that Barclay's halt influenced his resolution. The orders of the twenty-first and twenty-second direct the advance of the whole army in three somewhat widely-separated columns, which was a natural step to take if immediate battle was not impending; and they were modified on the twenty-fourth so as to bring the columns nearer together, when he thought Barclay was awaiting him. The final resolution to advance on Moscow seems therefore to have been taken on the twentieth or twenty-first of August, and upon general grounds of policy.

CHAPTER VII.

BORODINO.

When Napoleon quitted Smolensk on his eastward march, his own immediate army was still appreciably stronger than that opposed to it, and might expect victory if the enemy could be brought to close quarters. His wings also were, for the present at least, well able to hold their own; indeed it is sometimes said that the success of Oudinot and St. Cyr turned the scale in favour of advance, by relieving him of all anxiety for his left flank and rear. In other respects, however, things were going badly for him. The enormous length of his communications made it necessary to call up Victor with the 9th corps from the Niemen, to support and control the detachments left at Minsk, Vitepsk, and other places, and to assist St. Cyr if, contrary to expectation, Wittgenstein should prove too strong for him. At the same time some divisions of the so-called 11th corps were brought forward to the Niemen, though they did not actually enter on Russian soil till much later.

It may be questioned whether, apart from Victor's corps, the many thousands of reinforcements who were from time to time sent forwards, in larger or smaller bodies, brought any substantial increase to Napoleon's strength. Unless Chambray is to be altogether discredited, everything behind

the army was in incredible confusion, partly through inherent difficulties, partly through bad management. For instance, Chambray[1] says that soldiers of all kinds going from Kowno to Vilna were only allowed rations for three days, and were expected to march the whole distance, considerably over sixty miles, in that time—a task impossible for convalescents, and uselessly severe for all, especially in the height of summer. Requisitions produced nothing in Lithuania, for the peasants, supposing themselves to be freed from their masters by the new *régime*, refused to work at the harvest; and the continual marauding, due to troops passing through without receiving proper supplies or being kept under thorough control, had destroyed most of the resources of a region naturally poor, besides alienating all classes of the inhabitants. It would doubtless have been difficult in a country thinly peopled, and possessing hardly any decent roads, so to organise the incessant transport required as to forward reinforcements, ammunition, supplies, with adequate punctuality over an ever-lengthening distance. Apparently however no real attempt was made to cope with the difficulties. Napoleon had, or thought he had, provided for everything, and possibly if he could have been everywhere himself, and have directed every detail with absolute authority, many evils might have been remedied. In his inevitable absence everything went wrong: the well-intentioned were hampered by the ingrained habit of blind obedience, and did not act on their own responsibility; the lazy had every opportunity of neglecting their duty, and the corrupt of filling their own pockets. Whether Napoleon knew the real state of things may at least be doubted; the despot whose will nobody

[1] Chambray, i. 245.

disputes tends to assume that for him to give an order is equivalent to having it executed. He certainly betrayed no misgivings, and there can be no evidence whether he felt any.

Of the progress of the Grand Army very little was known in Europe generally. Napoleon had from the first reduced to a minimum his soldiers' communications with home, and one can easily imagine that in the disorganisation of all transport private letters from the army fared badly. No agent from any of his allies was allowed to approach nearer than Königsberg or Warsaw. Even to Maret, who remained at Vilna as Napoleon's representative, the information given by the Emperor in the various orders which he was directed to transmit was extremely misleading. The exaggerations of success, of the losses inflicted on the Russians, etc., were nearly as gross in the despatches to his own subordinates as in the bulletins sent home to Paris. This alone might work no harm; but when we find him saying to Maret,[1] who was charged with the general superintendence of everything in rear, "le pays est beau, la récolte superbe, et nous trouvons partout de quoi vivre," one is in doubt whether the habit of falsehood was so strong that he could not help lying even when it was obviously to his own detriment, or whether he was really in a fool's paradise.

The bulletins themselves are only interesting to those curious in mendacity. They of course narrate correctly the general movements, and they mention the various encounters with Russian troops, but beyond this not a word is to be trusted. Napoleon claimed to have killed, wounded, or taken, before he quitted Smolensk, at least as many Russians as were ever included in the two armies of Barclay

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,011.

and Bagration. And he caused his official narratives to be supplemented by so-called private letters, addressed not to the *Moniteur* but to the other papers which he allowed to appear in Paris. It is impossible to read any of these without perceiving that they were written to order. There is not a trace of the personal experiences, of the occasional grumbling, of the individualities of any kind which must appear in such correspondence. The style is that of the Carmagnoles of the Reign of Terror, the style which renders all Napoleon's effusions merely theatrical when they are meant to be sublime. How far the French public took the Emperor's bulletins for gospel can only be conjectured; the press was completely enslaved wherever Napoleon's power extended. The undoubted fact that the Grand Army was penetrating deeply into Russia implied considerable present success. France was accustomed to victory, and had no reason, as yet, to suppose that Napoleon was going to fail. Elsewhere in Europe, whatever men's secret wishes may have been, nothing seems to have been known to justify any unfavourable expectation. The accounts in French newspapers of the perfect peace and prosperity reigning in Prussia, where it was said that nothing indicated a state of war save the occasional sight of troops on the high roads which they never strayed from, were of course totally untrue, though doubtless the misery and oppression were less than earlier in the year, when between 400,000 and 500,000 men were quartered in Poland and Prussia. But the hope of having a chance of rising against the tyrant was dim and distant. Metternich's private letters to Count Stackelberg are couched in the most gloomy terms, as if everything was going from bad to worse. It is true that he was predisposed to expect failure so long as Rumantzov

was in office. In one he mentions the extremely unfavourable report of the Russian army given by Gneisenau in a letter to the King of Prussia, which apparently had been passed on for the information of Austria. Schwarzenberg's successes were a certain satisfaction: they were gratifying to Austrian military pride, and at the same time they were, in scale and in locality, incapable of exerting serious influence on the campaign as a whole. Not until weeks after the French were in retreat from Moscow does Metternich seem to have had a hope that the ultimate result would be, what all along he had ardently desired, a severe blow to Napoleon's power.

In England alone was there anything like a correct idea of what was going on in Russia. Thanks to British control of the seas, the mails came regularly from the Baltic, bringing news from the Russian side, and the Paris papers came as steadily as if the two countries were not at war. In the *Times* of 1812 extracts from French newspapers recur almost as frequently as the telegraphed letters of its Paris correspondent now, though obviously the news could not be as fresh. All Napoleon's bulletins, all the equally mendacious documents given as private letters from the seat of war, appear translated in the columns of the *Times*, sometimes side by side with Russian official papers which often lied with equal vigour in the opposite direction; and the sagacity of the leader writers usually sufficed to infer from the rival falsehoods something like the truth. The habit of discounting Napoleon's official statements led them into the error of greatly under-estimating his forces at the outset, and therefore his chances of success. But they seem to have fully anticipated that the Russians would defend themselves by retreating, and to have discerned

the vital importance to Russia of Barclay and Bagration effecting a junction, even at the risk of a great battle.

The haunting dread of Napoleon's enemies on the Continent was that the Russian government might quail before the invader. So far as can be discerned from expressions of public opinion in the press, and from such ministerial despatches as are extant, this fear was little felt in England. Secure behind the narrow seas, and conscious of possessing enormous power of putting pressure on the enemy, the British nation could look at the progress of the war with equanimity, and was even unduly optimistic. Aware of the Treaty of Bucharest, but ignorant of the uncertainties that preceded its ultimate ratification, it expected the Russian forces from the Danube to appear on the northern theatre of war long before this was really feasible. Aware of the still earlier peace between Russia and Sweden, it expected a diversion in north Germany, which the British fleet could of course have greatly facilitated. The government was kept fully informed by Thornton of the reasons which made active co-operation from Sweden more than improbable for the present. The Crown Prince maintained that he dared not break with France and plunge his adopted country into war, without offering her some palpable advantage in return, and had fixed his gaze on Norway. Russia made no objection, desiring to divert Swedish attention from the recent loss of Finland. England acquiesced in principle, on the assumption that the Norwegians would not object, but saw clearly that attacking Denmark in Norway would be doing no hurt to Napoleon, and therefore would go no further than agreeing to procure Norway for Sweden at the general peace. An alternative scheme for attacking Zealand, if Denmark would not peaceably yield Norway,

promised a little better. England did not mean to permit Sweden permanently to acquire both shores of the entrance to the Baltic, but as the expedition could not be made without the co-operation of the British fleet, she could fix her own terms. Nothing however came of the project, beyond inspiring vague alarm and causing additional defences to be prepared along the south coast of the Baltic; between the extreme poverty of Sweden and the inability of Russia to spare troops, no expedition was ready before the summer ended. There is no reason to doubt Bernadotte's sincerity. He had made up his mind as to the course best calculated to further the interests of Sweden, which were also his own; but he was in Thornton's opinion[1] needlessly fearful of risking his own immediate position by any step which would not be universally acceptable to the Swedes. As a matter of fact, the delay both in the south and in the north proved advantageous to the common cause. The Russian armies from Finland and from Moldavia, converging on Napoleon's line of communications after he had begun his retreat and not before, made the ruin of the Grand Army total. And Swedish military co-operation proved of considerable value in 1813.

From Smolensk to Moscow the operations of the campaign were of the utmost simplicity. The Russian army retreated directly on their base, from time to time threatening to give battle, and once actually doing so; the French followed them, sufficiently concentrated to be able to accept battle whenever it might be offered, but unable to compel it. From the nature of the case, the Russians suffered very little; they had ample magazines on the road, so that the soldiers were well supplied with food, and

[1] Thornton to Castlereagh, September, R. O. Sweden, 219.

they had no difficulty in destroying any stores which they could not carry off, so that nothing fell into the hands of the enemy. Much of the outpost and rear-guard duty was done by Cossacks, accustomed, men and horses alike, to live hardly, and scarcely capable of fatigue. The regular rear-guard had of course occasional combats to sustain, but only when the general chose to hold a position; for the Russian army, with its advantages, could easily outmarch the invaders. The French, on the other hand, suffered considerably; each march took the army further from its depôts, and rendered it increasingly difficult for food to be supplied to the troops. In fact to a large extent they had to live by marauding, and as the inhabitants of the places along the road[1] had almost entirely disappeared, taking away all that could be removed, the French had to spread for many miles on each side of the road in search of food. This obviously added greatly to their fatigue, and gave great opportunities for straggling. Still worse was the lack of water, especially of course to the horses. The streams of that region run very low in summer, and even the Russians suffered seriously at times, though they could encamp where the best supplies were to be found. Naturally the French following after them found the pools drunk up, the wells dry, and the streamlets trampled into mud by the passage of thousands of men and horses. Moreover the order of march, adopted by Napoleon in order that he might be able to concentrate rapidly for battle, was extremely trying for the troops. The country

[1] This was less true at some distance off the high roads. Labaume, who was with Eugene's corps forming the left column, mentions various villages which the inhabitants still occupied, and country houses deserted by the owners but intact.

being level and open, he made at least one corps on the right and another on the left move parallel with the main column, by cross roads or by none at all, at some miles' distance, with the natural result that they took much longer about the day's work, occasionally encountering very serious difficulties.[1] For the same reason, apparently, he kept the troops on a wide front and in close order. An eye-witness gives a lively picture of the sufferings they endured, marching day after day in great heat, blinded and choked by the dust which they themselves raised. Similarly he kept a great mass of cavalry together in the advanced guard, with the view of preventing the Russians from taking advantage of bridges, defiles through woods, and the like. It cannot be shown that any real advantage was in fact thus reaped, though it easily might have been; but the detriment to the cavalry was real and serious. The unanimous testimony of all eye-witnesses is that from the first Murat had overworked them; he thought of nothing but the day of battle, took no care for their subsistence, exhausted them by useless movements. Almost from the first forage had failed to be served out, and the horses therefore rapidly deteriorated. From Smolensk onwards, at any rate, they had to live on rye straw, and the more they were massed together the less easy it was to procure even this. Under all the circumstances it is not wonderful that on the day of Borodino the army numbered only about five-eighths of its total on approaching Smolensk.[2]

[1] For instance, see Labaume, 110.

[2] The losses at Smolensk and Lubino amounted to perhaps 20,000 men, and detachments had necessarily been left behind; but there still remain a great many thousands to be accounted for through sickness and straggling.

There is a continual conflict of testimony as to the destruction which befell every Russian town and village, each side being accused by the other of wilful vandalism. The matter was not really so important as it seemed, for except in two or three small towns there was nothing to destroy except empty wooden hovels. Some villages were set on fire in the ordinary course of military operations, and this was doubtless done all the more frequently[1] since the injury thereby done to the invaders greatly outweighed the loss sustained by Russia. The Russians had certainly no settled policy of destroying everything; for of the two largest places on the road, Gzhatsk fell uninjured into the hands of the French, and at Viasma the conflagration spread from the burning stores after the French had occupied it. On the other hand, Napoleon had so obvious an interest in preserving the places through which his line of communication passed, that it is incredible he should have ordered their destruction. His troops however, who had to plunder or starve, naturally grew more reckless as time went on. They had to cook where and how they could, to bivouac anywhere; fires lighted for these purposes easily spread to houses all built of wood, and the soldiers took no trouble to check the mischief. It was but rarely, says Chambray, who was himself with the central column, that a village escaped burning till the rear-guard reached it. The utmost that can be said against Napoleon in the matter is that he did not attempt

[1] Jomini's assertion that if anything was preserved it was due to the French vanguard, who frequently fought the enemy with one hand while they extinguished the flames with the other, is the worst exaggeration in his generally reasonable book. But he was not an eye-witness of the march, and the testimony of Chambray and of Labaume, who were, is decisive.

to check this mischief, which indeed it would have been extremely difficult to repress. His mind was occupied with the one idea of pressing forward and extorting peace at the sword's point; and if he supposed, as Chambray seems to think possible, that the more cruel a scourge the war proved the more likely the Russians were to give way, he singularly misjudged them. As a matter of fact it worked the other way; what was untruly represented as the systematic barbarism of the invaders stimulated the patriotic zeal of the Russians.

After the battle of Valutino-Lubino there was of course no doubt either that the Russian army must retire a little further, or that it would sooner or later stand to fight a defensive battle. The only question for Barclay was where to make a stand. Obviously a satisfactory position must be found, no easy matter in that boundless plain; obviously also, the nearer he approached to Moscow the better would be the prospect of receiving reinforcements, and the greater would be the necessary shrinkage of Napoleon's forces. On the other hand the political results of delay, discouragement to the nation, and discontent at what might well be deemed incapacity or cowardice in the general or government, were evils that might easily outweigh the military advantage. These considerations obviously guided Barclay's conduct in the days after Lubino. His first step of retreat was conducted rapidly and in good order; there is no trace of any of the thousands of wounded being abandoned at Lubino. The troops who had fought on the nineteenth, though they had been marching all the night before, achieved a twenty-mile march on the twentieth, and rejoined Dokhturov's column at Solovievo, where the whole army crossed the Dnieper.

On the next day however, after another long march, Barclay halted his army in a fairly advantageous position[1] four or five miles west of Dorogobuzh, recalling Bagration, who was a little way in advance, to act as reserve. Before the French came up, however, Bagration had induced Barclay to retire to another position nearer Dorogobuzh. This in its turn was abandoned as unsuitable, and the Russians retreated further. The purely military reasons against risking a battle were still valid, and Barclay, whose instincts were sound, though he lacked firmness to express himself decidedly, was not unwilling to postpone decisive action. At Viasma, on the twenty-seventh, General Miloradovich arrived with a reinforcement of 15,000 men, less than had been anticipated, but still important. Barclay now apparently made up his mind that the time was come, and was carefully preparing a position between Viasma and Gzhatsk, when on the evening of the twenty-ninth Prince Kutusov arrived to take over the supreme command.

This was the result of pressure which had been brought to bear upon the Tzar for many weeks, ever since the abandonment of Drissa. Before quitting the army Alexander had issued two addresses,[2] to the city of Moscow and to the Russian nation, dated from Polotsk on the eighteenth of July, in which he announced that great efforts were

[1] Clausewitz, who helped to mark it out, says that if they were to fight a defensive battle at all, as well there as anywhere.

[2] Both Chambray (i. 367) and Buturlin (i. 200) profess to give the text of these documents, but they differ so greatly in detail, though not in substance, that one might almost imagine them to be two separate drafts prepared from the same notes of what the Tzar intended. Buturlin, however, says that his version is literally translated from the addresses actually issued, which were of course in Russian.

necessary before the invaders could be successfully encountered, and called on his people with confidence to make the necessary sacrifices. The patriotic zeal of the Russians was strongly roused, while nothing was as yet known to have happened which should cause serious apprehension or inspire mistrust. The assembly of the nobles at Moscow offered to raise and equip for the field ten per cent. of the male population; the merchants agreed to an assessment on their capital, while individuals gave large separate contributions in addition.[1] The Tzar, probably thinking that organisation and arms would be wanting for the great numbers offered, limited the levies to certain provinces, while giving orders for equivalent amounts being raised on the crown lands. The continuance of the retreat caused great discontent among the nobles. They were necessarily ignorant of the purely military aspect of the matter, and were probably more annoyed than deceived by the official bulletins. If the armies were as successful as was represented, why retreat? If they were not, whose fault was it? Doubtless also the personal jealousies and ambitions, which had distracted the Russian head-quarters when the war began, continued to assert themselves around the Tzar. The cry was raised that Barclay, being a foreigner, was not sufficiently jealous for the honour of Russia, nay was perhaps a traitor. This was altogether unjust, for Barclay was the son of a Livonian pastor, and only remotely of Scottish extraction; but his native tongue was German, not Russian, and he owed his rise to merit, not to nobility of birth. Conscious of his unpopularity, and not by nature a man of commanding strength, he had conducted operations in a hesitating way, reluctant to run the frightful risk of

[1] Buturlin, i. 206.

fighting a pitched battle against odds, yet unable to impress on others, perhaps failing to convince himself, that steady and continued retreat was, from the military point of view, the only game to play. Gradually the demand became general that Barclay should be superseded, and the wish was almost equally general that the chief command should be bestowed on Kutusov. What exact circumstances led the Tzar to decide on satisfying such public opinion as existed in Russia does not appear. The conjecture of Clausewitz, that it was due to Barclay's taking and then suddenly abandoning the offensive early in August, agrees well with calculations of time and distance. Perhaps for form's sake, the Tzar appointed[1] a committee to consider and advise on the whole question. This committee met on the seventeenth of August, advised the nomination of a single commander-in-chief to control all armies in the field, and recommended Kutusov, who was nominated next day, and set out without delay.

The discontent among the chief officers of the army, which was largely the expression of personal rivalry as well as of rather unintelligent patriotic feeling, had been gradually growing since the beginning of the campaign, and was directed both against Barclay personally, and against the general policy of the chancellor Rumantzov, who was well known to have been the chief advocate of the French alliance, and was supposed to be ready to make great sacrifices in order to purchase peace. According to Sir Robert Wilson,[2] they were talking on his arrival at Smolensk of deposing Barclay and electing a new chief, but no more came of it for the time. After the loss of

[1] Danilevski, ii. 151.

[2] Invasion, 111—2.

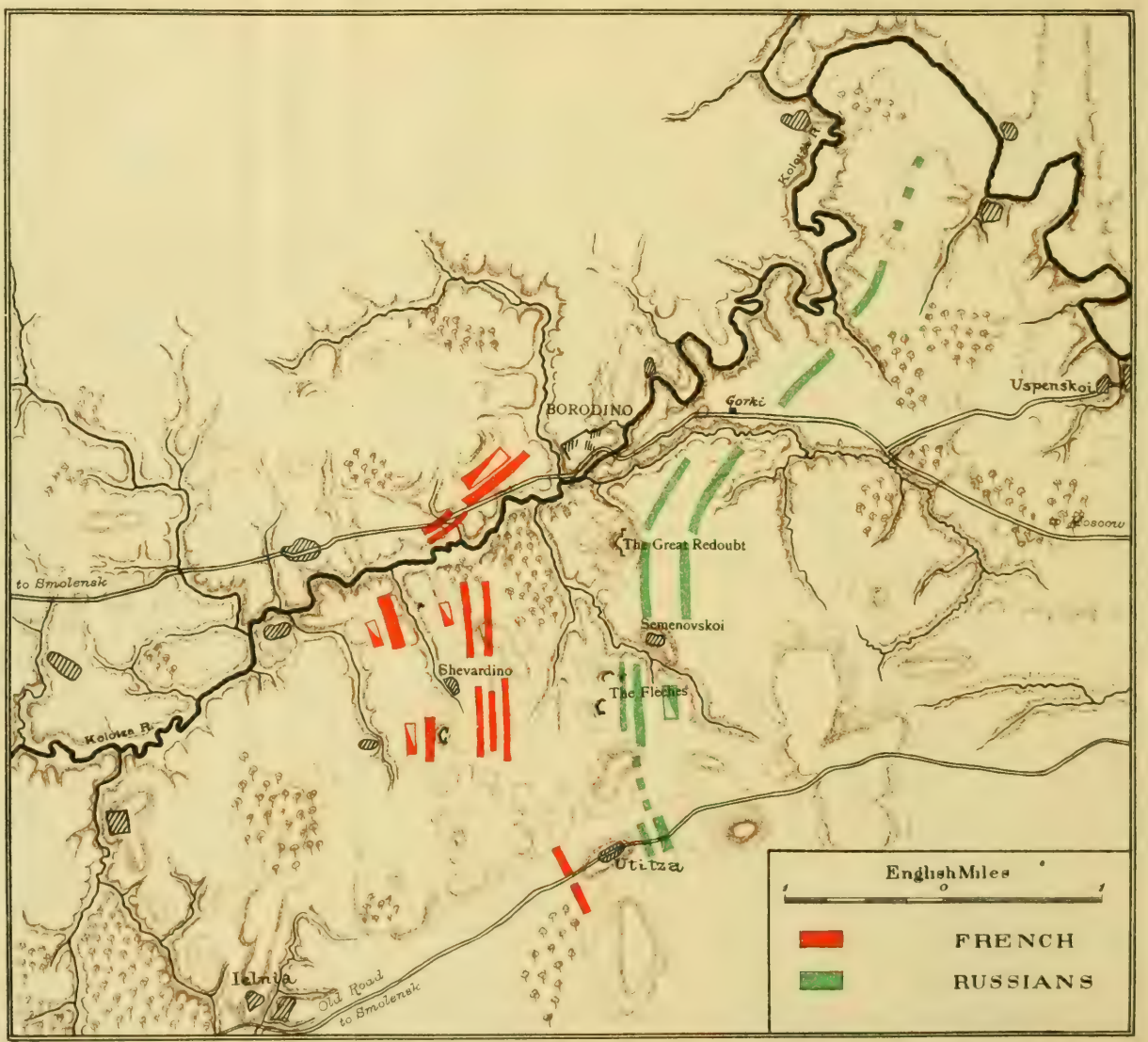
Smolensk, they resolved on sending to the Tzar not only a request for a new general, but also a declaration "that if any order came from St. Petersburg to suspend hostilities and treat the invaders as friends (which was apprehended to be the true motive of the retrograde movements in deference to the policy of Count Rumantzov) such an order would be regarded as one which did not express his Imperial Majesty's real sentiments and wishes, but had been extracted from his Majesty under false representations or external control; and that the army would continue to maintain his pledge and pursue the contest till the invader was driven beyond the frontier." Sir Robert Wilson, who on the strength of the Tzar's known personal regard for him was asked to convey this rebellious message, met Kutusov on his way to the army. He still however discharged his commission, and received from Alexander the most unqualified assurances of his resolution to persist: "he would sooner let his beard grow to the waist, and eat potatoes in Siberia, than permit any negotiations with Napoleon so long as an armed Frenchman remained in the territories of Russia."[1] At the same time he declared that he would not dismiss Rumantzov; that would be yielding too openly to dictation.

There is no reason for thinking that Kutusov was a more capable general than Barclay; he was over seventy years of age, and too stout to mount on horseback, and his mind was apparently not much more active than his body. He had been commander-in-chief at Austerlitz, but as it was notorious that the ruinous tactics of that day had not been inspired by him, his reputation had suffered little by that one great defeat. He was supposed to represent

[1] Wilson, Invasion, 119.

the fighting traditions of Suvorov, and had commanded with success during most part of the recent war with Turkey. His real merit was that he possessed the confidence of the nation, and could therefore carry on the military policy of his predecessor without its being suspected that he was throwing away opportunities of resistance to the invader. If Barclay had remained in command the great battle would have been fought, probably a few days sooner than at Borodino, and pretty certainly with much the same results; but it may be doubted whether Russia, or even the Tzar, would have submitted to the loss of Moscow with the same equanimity. With Kutusov in command, the Russians were satisfied that the best course available under the circumstances was being taken, but no other general with a grain of good sense could have acted very differently. In truth the state of things was now such that the general outline of action was dictated to both sides alike. Napoleon must press on to Moscow, the Russians must fight him first, and, given the existing conditions, the result of the battle might be predicted; and then Napoleon would have to return, with consequences which might also have been predicted.

Kutusov did not choose to accept battle in the position which the army occupied when he assumed the command. He retreated two or three days' march further, and then proceeded to fortify, so far as time admitted, the position of Borodino. It is needless to impute to Kutusov the puerile folly of abandoning a good position chosen by his predecessor, for fear lest if he won a great victory there the credit should be given in part to Barclay. He may well have thought it worth while to take the chance of finding something better; he may well have wished for a few days to become acquainted with the condition of the



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army, and he had good reason to know that a great victory was out of the question. In such a region as that traversed by the road from Smolensk to Moscow, it was impossible, as Clausewitz carefully points out, to discover a really strong and commanding position. The ground is practically a dead flat, the minor inequalities nowhere giving a wide view; the streams, when once the Dnieper is left behind, are small, shrinking almost to nothing in the height of summer.[1] There were no enclosures, the villages were all built of wood, and patches of forest interrupted the prospect in every direction. Under these conditions any position might be turned, and certainly would be if the defenders had been able to intrench it sufficiently in front to make a direct assault too costly. It was only because Napoleon desired above all things to bring his enemy to a decisive action, not because he could not approach nearer to Moscow without fighting, that he attacked at Borodino.

The small village which gives its name[2] to the battle is situated where the Moscow road crosses the Kolotza, a stream nearly dry in summer, flowing north-eastwards into the Moskva. The Kolotza makes a very sharp angle with the road, so that it formed a protection only for that part of

[1] Chambray (ii. 242) mentions a fact which vividly illustrates the topography. He says that Gzhatsk had a large trade in building flat-bottomed boats, in which during the flood season traffic was carried alike towards the Baltic, the Caspian, and the Black Sea.

[2] This, the Russian name, is obviously the most appropriate, and is generally accepted. The French call it after the river Moskva, which does not come within a couple of miles of the field. Napoleon, who, in the proclamation to his soldiers issued the night before the battle, speaks of it as fought *sous les murs de Moscou* (which was seventy miles off), desired that the name should suggest that it was fought practically for the possession of Moscow. Thiers' prediction, "ce nom lui restera dans les siècles" (xiv. 350), is not likely to be verified.

the line which extended north of the road, but there are some heights just south of Borodino, covered by a small ravine running northwards towards the Kolotza, which afforded a very solid centre to the Russian line. The elevation is but trifling, but the slope on the western side is steep enough to make ascending it at a rush somewhat of an effort. This higher ground is almost level for nearly a mile, with a very gentle descent eastwards; beyond this again is another little ravine, and another plateau a few feet higher. On a slight knoll about half a mile from Borodino a large redoubt was constructed, and nearly a mile further south were three smaller works of the triangular shape to which the name of flèche is given. All these fortifications had been very hastily made, there having been no time for finishing them thoroughly; and the soil being sandy, their front was hardly anywhere too steep to be scaled. Between these minor works and the great redoubt the village of Semenovskoi had been destroyed, wooden buildings being a mere trap to the defenders. From the southernmost of the flèches it was again nearly a mile to the old Moscow road, the intervening space being occupied by a wood, largely consisting of thick bushes. The whole position was thus convex, which was of obvious advantage when troops had to be shifted from the right to support the centre and even the left, but which on the other hand made the fire of the French, converging on a somewhat shorter curve, more deadly than the answering fire. The weak point of the position was the left, for it could easily be turned by the old road unless that was strongly defended, while the wood interposed an inconvenient obstacle; nor was there anything to the south on which the extreme left could rest.

Napoleon thought fit to halt for two whole days at Gzhatsk, in order to muster all his available resources for the impending battle. He required[1] full returns to be furnished on the night of the second of September, including not merely those present under arms, but also, separately, those who might be expected to rejoin within two or three days. The latter, who were chiefly but not all stragglers, amounted to nearly six per cent. From these returns, which give a total of 103,000 infantry and nearly 31,000 cavalry, Chambray[2] estimates the numbers which took part in the battle at 120,000. It is, however, scarcely probable that over ten per cent. should have been wanting five days later, even allowing for the losses in the action on the fifth, and the total may perhaps be reckoned at 125,000. The corps present at Borodino crossed the Niemen over 300,000 strong. Thus the shrinkage from all causes amounted to much more than half. Chambray's means of estimating accurately the Russian numbers were obviously less complete, and his calculations, which reduce to 92,000 the total of regular troops, are not convincing. It seems certain that Napoleon's army was somewhat larger than Kutusov's, and the latter comprised 10,000 of newly embodied militia, besides 7,000 Cossacks.[3] Probably

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,171. He gave as a reason for requiring so much detail that the information supplied would determine his course of action. If this was more than a form of words it meant that he was still doubtful whether to attack the Russians directly, or to compel them to a further retreat by turning their flank, always possible in that open country.

[2] Chambray, ii. 33.

[3] I have ignored the figures given by Buturlin, who exaggerates considerably the numbers on both sides, though he keeps roughly the same proportion, and who equally exaggerates the losses in the battle, especially of his enemies.

regular troops amounted to about 100,000, an inferiority fairly balanced by the advantage of defending a partially intrenched position.

Napoleon's Correspondence[1] during the days he spent at Gzhatsk gives marked evidence of the disorder prevailing in the Grand Army, and of the severe measures which the Emperor ordered by way of remedy, though it would appear that they mostly remained a dead letter. An order of the first of September strictly forbids any baggage or provision waggons to move before or with the artillery; no waggons are to come nearer than five miles behind the advanced guard on the march, or to be brought to its camp till after it has taken position, and all firing has ceased in front; any vehicles transgressing will be burned in the Emperor's presence. This order was commended to Berthier with a curt note that he had better take care the first example be not made with the head-quarters' staff. As the soldiers were supposed to carry food for some days, this was theoretically reasonable enough; but in practice generals careful for their men's subsistence did their best to keep provision waggons within reach, and Napoleon, though he made a parade of burning a few vehicles, did not persevere. Another letter to Berthier finds great fault with the lack of order in foraging for supplies, which, as he says, allows the enemy to take hundreds of prisoners daily—no doubt a calculated exaggeration. This letter is remarkable for its tacit confession that such marauding was necessary, in spite of the supplies which covered the whole road back to the frontier. But the remedy he orders, adequate protection by the cavalry of all foragers, was impossible of application. Whether the Emperor knew

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,168—19,176.

it or not, his soldiers spread to plunder over the country for many miles north and south of the road; not all the cavalry he possessed could have afforded adequate protection. Another deals with the sending up from the rear of men who had been left behind: all are to be formed into provisional battalions; on no account is a lesser body to be allowed to move. According to the despatch he was expecting 5,000 men to start from Smolensk at once, and 2,600 more in a few days. Most of these were no doubt convalescents, but many were stragglers, men who had strayed too far while foraging for food, and had been left behind.

On the morning[1] of the 4th of September the Grand Army moved forward from Gzhatsk, and soon after noon on the fifth came within reach of Borodino. The Russian rear-guard had been steadily retiring before them, and during the night had rejoined the main body. Russian troops occupied the hamlets situated a mile or two in front of the final position, and a small redoubt above Shevardino was armed with a dozen heavy guns. Napoleon ordered three divisions of Davout's corps, supported by the cavalry, to make a direct attack on this advanced force, and after some sharp fighting, which cost each side more than 1,000 men,[2] the Russians were driven back. Bagration, who

[1] Thiers (xiv. 301) asserts that the weather was so frightfully bad the first three days of September that Napoleon was thinking of turning back if the weather had not become fine on the fourth. As none of the eye-witnesses make any reference to this bad weather, we may safely infer that Thiers imagined it as a basis for his suggestion that fortune, which had in the past given Napoleon several striking favours, might here have saved him by an apparent misfortune.

[2] The French loss was naturally heaviest in storming the redoubt. There is a story told by several of the authorities that Napoleon next morning asked the commander of the 61st regiment where his third

commanded the whole left, made a counter-attack at nightfall, and recovered the redoubt—a very ill-judged step, since Poniatowski's corps had by that time advanced far enough on the old Moscow road to turn this Shevardino position, which had only been occupied for the subsidiary purpose of retarding the French advance, and discovering in what exact direction it was being made. Before the French could bring up troops to retake the redoubt, Kutusov had sent orders for withdrawing to the Borodino position, and the French reoccupied it without resistance.

Thiers[1] relates that on the eve of Borodino Napoleon received from Paris a portrait of his son. Jomini says the same, adding that he had it fixed up on the outside of his tent for the army to see. Unfortunately, if this be true at all, it was one of Napoleon's bits of theatrical humbug, for he had written[2] a fortnight before to express his pleasure at receiving it. Equally false is the story told by the same writers of the news of Salamanca reaching him at the same juncture. He had heard the news some days before, and had written on the second of September[3] expressing violent displeasure against Marmont. It is of course possible, though hardly likely, that the aide-de-camp charged with the tidings should have arrived four days after the written

battalion was. "In the redoubt, sire," was the answer. It must be remembered that most battalions had by this time shrunk to less than half of their original strength. It is a marked instance of Thiers' recklessness about numbers that he declares this small combat to have cost the Russians seven or eight thousand men, and the French between four and five.

[1] Thiers, xiv. 318. He rarely condescends to give authorities for anything he states, but he apparently derives this story from Fain (ii. 8), who tells it with further sentimental details.

[2] Nap. Corr. 19,118.

[3] Nap. Corr. 19,175.

despatch. Thiers' dramatic purpose is obvious, and in pursuing it he is not particular about accuracy.

Napoleon spent the sixth in reconnoitring the enemy and fixing his plan of attack, for which the troops made the necessary movements after dark, so that the battle might begin at daybreak on the seventh. His plan was of the simplest kind—to mass guns at points convenient for cannonading the Russian defences, and under cover of their fire to assault them with infantry; at the same time Poniatowski was to advance by the old road and turn the enemy's left. Davout with three divisions of his corps was posted on the right, in front of the captured Shevardino redoubt, and was to attack the flèches along the edge of the wood. Ney, with Junot in support, prolonged the line to the Kolotza, and was to attack towards Semenovskoi. Eugene, with as much of his own corps as was on the field, and Davout's other two divisions, formed the left; he was to take possession of Borodino, and bide his time for assailing the great redoubt. In second line was posted the cavalry, Nansouty behind Davout, Latour-Maubourg behind Ney, and Grouchy with Eugene, while Montbrun was held in hand as a reserve. Finally behind the centre was the guard, except that part of its artillery had been sent to the front. Thus some 115,000 men were drawn up on a line not much beyond two miles in length. Since 5,000 men in single line extend about this distance, a small allowance being made for intervals, it will readily be seen how deep the formations must have been. The Russians, as the day advanced, came to be almost as much crowded, and this fact partially accounts for the extraordinary carnage in the battle.

The original position taken up by Kutusov was of

considerably greater length. Baggovut's corps, with Ostermann's to the left of it, lay along the Kolotza north of the high road, with some Cossacks on the flank as far as its junction with the Moskva. Dokhturov covered the space from the road to the great redoubt, with the defence of which he was charged. Thence to Semenovskoi stood Raevski, with Borozdin and Neverovski to the south of him, to hold the line of flèches. The wood on the left flank was occupied only by a few skirmishers, forming a connecting link with Tuchkov, who was posted at Utitza to face Poniatowski, supported by the 10,000 Moscow militia that had recently joined the army, and had not experience enough for the line of battle. Finally, Barclay was in general command of the right half, Bagration of the left. As on the French side, the cavalry was in second line, and the imperial guard in reserve behind the centre, but needlessly near to the front,[1] thus exposing the troops to loss from the enemy's cannonade before they were brought into action. Clausewitz expresses the opinion that while Kutusov was wise in occupying the whole space, the part to the north of the Moscow road should have been held only for appearance, and that most part of the troops placed on the right, with cavalry withdrawn from the centre and left, 50,000 in all, including Tuchkov's corps, should have been moved a mile or more in rear of the left, ready to fall on the enemy's flank after he had by direct attack driven in the front line. Whether this could have been done unknown to the French, and a sudden and effective attack could have been made on the flank of the enemy deeming himself already victorious,

[1] The cavalry line was only about 400 paces behind the infantry, and the reserves about 1,000 in rear of the cavalry. Clausewitz, 155.

depended on the exact topography. It may be doubted however whether, against a foe so rapid and fertile of resource as Napoleon, the simpler plan of obstinate direct resistance was not safer; it certainly accorded better with the character of the Russian soldiery.

It will be noticed that Napoleon in his dispositions for attack ignored the Russian right, thrown back at a considerable angle to the centre, and therefore not in a position to outflank his left. Moreover he held the left somewhat back, making his first effort on the right, where he could for the time bring very superior numbers to bear. If the troops holding Semenovskoi and the flèches could be defeated before they were supported from the distant right, and Poniatowski could also get round the Russian left flank, their whole army might possibly be driven northwards upon the Moskva, and at best would have great difficulty in escaping by the high road. The plan was well conceived, but not successfully executed. The Russian tenacity of defence made it impossible to dislodge them anywhere without protracted fighting, and Poniatowski was never strong enough to overcome his immediate opponents. Two more divisions added to his corps might have turned the scale. Probably the woods had rendered it impossible to ascertain by reconnaissance on the sixth the real strength of the Russians on the old Moscow road; if there had been no solid body of troops there, Poniatowski's 10,000 men would have amply sufficed. Davout, says Jomini, wished Napoleon to let him keep all his five divisions, and to push vigorously forward through the wood to his right with part, before directly attacking the southernmost flèche with the rest, and it is plain that this must have succeeded. The Russian centre and left was in fact driven

back later in the day, after it had been considerably reinforced, and therefore must have given way early before a heavier attack than that actually made. But this might obviously have led to the speedy retreat of the whole Russian army, and thus have deferred the pitched battle which it was Napoleon's first object to bring about. To find the middle course between a plan of attack which might prematurely alarm the enemy, and one which would reduce the battle to sheer hard fighting, required very delicate steering, and it is no wonder that Napoleon, of course imperfectly aware of the Russian dispositions, failed to hit it off exactly.

At daybreak, when the troops were under arms waiting for the signal for action, Napoleon's proclamation was read by every captain to his company.

"Soldats, voila la bataille que vous avez tant desirée. Désormais la victoire depend de vous : elle nous est nécessaire : elle nous donnera l'abondance, de bons quartiers d'hiver, et un prompt retour dans la patrie. Conduisez-vous comme à Austerlitz, à Friedland, à Vitepsk, à Smolensk, et que la postérité la plus reculée cite votre conduite dans cette journée. Que l'on dise de vous : il était à cette grande bataille sous les murs de Moscou."

It had the merit of brevity, but it was not an inspiriting document, and Chambray, who was present, says that it was coldly received ; Labaume goes so far as to say that they all knew they must win the battle or perish. It was perfectly true that victory was necessary ; defeat would have meant immediate ruin, but the courage of despair is not the sentiment which a general seeks to infuse into his soldiers before an offensive battle. And there was a grievous bathos in appending to Austerlitz and Friedland,

Vitepsk, where there was only the slow driving in of an obstinate rear-guard, and Smolensk, where repeated assaults had produced little effect except great slaughter. And the veterans, who as a matter of fact had been kept in Germany or Poland ever since the march on Ulm seven years before, must have felt that the promise of a speedy return home, while their faces were still set eastwards, was merely a mockery, as for nearly all of them it turned out to be. Nevertheless the soldiers fought with their accustomed energy, against enemies who, if less inured to war, were inspired by still stronger motives, by all the fire of patriotism and hatred of the invaders.

Kutusov's counter-stimulant was of a very different character. Parading through the camp the sacred image of the Virgin which had been carefully rescued from Smolensk, and carried with the army ever since attended by a guard of priests, he called on his soldiers to fight in the cause of God, and overthrow the arch-rebel against all laws human and divine. The professions of ardent piety accorded but ill with the old general's personal habits and character, but they appealed to the strongest feelings of at least the private soldiers. More splendid courage and endurance have seldom been exhibited in battle than by both French and Russians in the struggle of the next day; and it may be said that both sides attained their object, though at frightful cost. The French won the victory which saved them from immediate ruin; the Russians, though they hardly knew it, had brought materially nearer the day of their enemy's inevitable destruction.

Soon after dawn, while the troops were making the preliminary movements already indicated, Napoleon took up his position somewhat to the east of the Shevardino redoubt

captured on the fifth, near where his guard was drawn up. From this point he could see the whole of the Russian centre and left centre, the part of their line which he meant to attack in earnest. Their extreme left it was impossible to see from any central place, because of the intervening woods, and he could hardly see down to the village of Borodino, but this was of little consequence. Here he remained throughout the day, and many French writers say that his inertness prevented the victory from being complete. He was certainly suffering from a cold. The eighteenth bulletin was written the next day in the Emperor's own hand, he being too hoarse to dictate according to his usual habit; but there is not the slightest reason for supposing that this influenced the result of the battle. As Jomini very reasonably points out, a commander-in-chief will never change his station during a battle on a great scale without the gravest reason. Nor was it an occasion to demand rapid change of plan, or promptitude in meeting unexpected emergencies. He had chosen to assail the Russian army instead of dislodging it; and this decision once taken, the battle may almost be said to have fought itself. It is just possible to argue that Napoleon twice hesitated unduly, and decided in favour of the less venturesome course, and that this was due to his cold; but the most competent opinions agree that on both these occasions he decided rightly—first when he postponed a further advance in the centre on hearing of the Russian cavalry demonstration on his left, secondly when he resolved not to use up his last reserves in a final attack. On the whole the theory that Napoleon was physically, and therefore mentally, disabled from doing his best at Borodino must be dismissed to the limbo of similar legends, which are made to account

for his every failure to achieve a startling success. Such difficulties he doubtless did encounter in the course of his career; but it is sufficiently brilliant, with all the failures, not to need artificial adornment.

Borodino has been described by as many writers as any battle in history, unless it be Waterloo, many of them actual eye-witnesses, and none better illustrates the limitations on the value of testimony about a complicated event like a battle. I have given the course of events with as much precision in relation to time as possible, on careful comparison of the statements made by the authorities (which often say very little about time), and on consideration of the distances to be traversed; and I do not think that any point essential to the comprehension of the battle is seriously disputed. But the contradictions about matters of important detail are endless, as was to be expected. Even so marked a thing as the firing of the signal cannon is dated at all times from 5.30 to 7 a.m. An officer on Napoleon's own staff seems entirely ignorant that Morand's division, which made the premature and unsuccessful attack on the great redoubt, was under Eugene's command. The Russian cavalry diversion against the French left is mentioned vaguely by most writers, except Clausewitz who took part in it. Some even seem to place it after the capture of the redoubt; Thiers, who times it pretty correctly, goes so far as to state that Napoleon *s'élança au galop* to discover what it meant, whereas all authorities concur in saying that the Emperor remained stationary all day. And there is discernible in nearly all the French writers an impression of the awfulness of Borodino.[1] A victory they consider it to be, but there is no exultation; it is as if the obstinacy of

[1] See for instance Chambray, ii. 82.

the conflict, the endless roar of the artillery, had deadened their energies, and made them unable to look beyond those frightful heaps of dead.

At six o'clock the signal was given by guns opening on the French right, and the firing was rapidly taken up along the line. Almost at once Davout moved forward to attack the southern end of the Russian works; a little later Ney advanced directly against the northernmost flèche. The Russians resisted stubbornly, but they were for the time greatly outnumbered, and by eight o'clock the French were in possession of the line of works, though these, being entirely open in rear, gave them no protection against the Russian fire. Poniatowski meanwhile had reached Utitza, but was unable to penetrate the marshy wood beyond, and for a long time was reduced to mere skirmishing, although one of Tuchkov's divisions under Konovnitzin had been moved to the right in order to help in withstanding Davout. Eugene also had taken Borodino with no great difficulty, and was bringing most of his troops across the Kolotza in preparation for attacking the great redoubt.

Kutusov, who from his post above Gorki was able to see nearly the whole French army, soon perceived both that Bagration was being overpowered and that the corps on the right were useless there. He accordingly drew in Baggovut to the centre, and also sent forward part of his reserve to assist Bagration. Baggovut reached Semenovskoi towards nine o'clock, but before that Bagration had succeeded in driving the French back, and reoccupied his original position. The fighting was for some time of the most obstinate character; the flèches were taken and retaken; charges of heavy cavalry alternated with the infantry attacks. Half Junot's corps was brought up to support

Ney; all Davout's divisions were drawn into the fight. After a desperate struggle, in the course of which Bagration was wounded,[1] the French obtained final possession of Semenovskoi and of the flèches. The Russian left centre however, now under Konovnitzin, was only drawn back about a mile, its left still rested on the wood further eastwards, and its artillery commanded the ground now held by the French. The right centre still held the great redoubt, for Eugene's first attack on it with Morand's division, though momentarily successful, had entirely failed. Indeed great exultation spread through the Russian army at the report that Murat had been captured, General Bonami, commanding one of Morand's brigades, who fell into the Russians' hands badly wounded, having been mistaken for him. Kutusov had however found it necessary to draw in Ostermann from the right, so that his whole army was now engaged on a front even narrower than the French. His different corps were by this time greatly mixed up, for part of Baggovut's had gone to the extreme left to help Tuchkov, while part of Tuchkov's had, as before mentioned, come to support the left centre.

Between eleven and twelve the battle in the centre had fallen away to a cannonade, and Napoleon was on the point of reinforcing Ney with part of his guard for a further advance, which if successful would have decided the day, when he was stopped by news of a Russian counter-attack on his extreme left. Soon after Borodino had been taken

[1] Bagration's wound, though not at first deemed dangerous, proved fatal some weeks afterwards. He was a serious loss to the Russians, not merely because he was a fighting general of considerable energy, but also because his rank gave him weight with Kutusov. It is probable that if he had survived the French retreat would have been more pressed by the Russian army, possibly intercepted altogether.

by the French, Platov with a body of Cossacks discovered that Napoleon's line hardly extended beyond Borodino, and he sent to Kutusov proposing a cavalry attack round the French left flank. The reports from the front to that time were that Bagration and Tuchkov were holding their own, and Kutusov sent Uvarov's cavalry corps, 2,500 strong, to make the suggested attack, without considering what could be gained by it, or even giving the commander distinct orders. Clausewitz, who was at the time on Uvarov's staff, condemns this movement severely. He points out that it was rash for the weaker army to withdraw 2,500 men from its line of battle, that cavalry alone could not make a real impression, and that in a battle of the scale of Borodino the enemy could easily repel it, no surprise being possible, at the cost of a little delay; further, that what might perhaps have been useful as a last stroke could produce no effect so early in the day. The attack was made, with no further result than to recall Eugene with part of his corps to the left bank of the Kolotza, and so to delay for an hour or two the next great move.

While Eugene's divisions were returning to their ground, and the Russians were moving up to sustain the impending further attack, a furious cannonade was kept up on both sides; 800 guns, if Jomini be correct, were thundering on two opposing lines considerably less than two miles long. The impression produced on the minds of eye-witnesses by this hitherto unheard-of mass of artillery was profound, perhaps out of proportion to its real destructiveness; but the losses inflicted were most serious. General Montbrun was killed by a cannon-ball, just as his corps of cavalry was preparing to charge the Russian line a little south of the great redoubt, in co-operation with Eugene's direct

attack. Auguste Caulaincourt, taking his place, broke through the Russians in front, and then wheeling to the left, rushed upon the rear of the great redoubt and penetrated through its entrance just as Eugene's infantry was swarming in over the front. The Russian troops who held the work were thus surrounded, but they fought to the last, and were all cut to pieces. In the *mêlée* Caulaincourt was killed, to the great grief of the whole army, for he was a universal favourite. The capture of a redoubt by cavalry is naturally an unusual thing, and fervent admirers have represented the performances of the French cavalry at Borodino as quite extraordinary and superhuman; but all this is founded on a tacit misrepresentation of what the Russian defences were. It is absurd to speak of the hasty field-works of the Russians as if they were regularly finished fortifications, against which cavalry would be as helpless as against a man-of-war. Such works only afford protection against the enemy's fire; they count for but little as defence against a hand-to-hand attack. In modern times, with the immense range and great accuracy of rifle fire, they afford protection for so long that assailants in front can rarely, if ever, reach them. With the musketry of 1812, there was nothing to prevent cavalry or infantry, with a certain percentage of loss, charging defences, most of which amounted to little more than shelter trenches. On both sides the cavalry[1] had an ample share in the fighting, and deserved equal praise with the infantry for their obstinate valour, but it was only in the imagination of French writers that their horsemen performed miracles.

[1] Chambray's statement that the French cavalry suffered more than the Russian, while the reverse was the case with the infantry, is curiously illustrated by the fact that the general commanding every French cavalry corps was either killed or wounded.

The capture of the great redoubt substantially ended the battle. The Russians had been driven from the whole of their original position, but they were not routed—they were not even in disorder. Their line, greatly diminished in numbers but still unbroken still faced Napoleon in a position very similar to the first, though of course not intrenched, and their guns still dealt forth destruction. Kutusov even began a movement to make a counter-attack towards Semenovskoi, but the fire of the French artillery was too deadly; Ostermann's corps first halted and then retired again before it. The loss it sustained was apparently a sheer waste, for there was no real chance of reversing the verdict of the day; but it undoubtedly contributed something towards averting possibly total defeat. Napoleon could not believe that Kutusov would venture such a movement with his last reserve, as was in fact the case, and decided not to employ his guard, his own last reserve, in attempting to shatter the Russian army. That he was right in this resolve cannot be doubted; he had advanced 690 miles into actively hostile territory, while Germany was submissive only through fear. To run the risk, slight perhaps but appreciable, of having his guard badly cut up would have been madness in his position. He had so far got the better of the Russians that he might perhaps reach Moscow without another battle. He could achieve no more by further expenditure of men, and he might yet have urgent need of them.

The cannonade continued till dark, but there was no other fighting after the abandonment of Ostermann's attempted advance. Baggovut, who had succeeded to the command of the extreme left when Tuchkov was killed, withdrew into line with the rest, still covering the old road; and night fell upon the armies still facing each

other as at dawn, though on different ground, but with 70,000 or more dead and wounded men strewing the battle-field. Kutusov did not think it expedient, in view of his enormous losses, to hold his ground, and retreated before morning in good order.[1] The road being of great width, they were able to move easily, and a rear-guard of 10,000 men under Miloradovich kept at bay the languid pursuit of the French, so that the army was several days in reaching Moscow. Immediate retreat was perhaps unnecessary; there is some reason to believe that Napoleon could not have fought another pitched battle then and there for lack of ammunition.[2] The delay would only have been for a very few days at the most; there is no reason to doubt, as there is in the case of Eylau, the substantial wisdom of the Russian general's resolution to retreat before the enemy could even harass the movement; but a halt even of a single day, facing Napoleon, would have lent some little plausibility to Kutusov's baseless claim of a victory.

Napoleon's bulletin claims as usual a glorious and decisive triumph; he asserts that he has inflicted on the enemy a loss of 40,000 or 50,000 men and taken a great number of prisoners, while himself only losing a fifth of

[1] Chambray somehow obtained the idea that the Russians were in utter confusion, but Clausewitz, who was with them, declares emphatically that this was not the case.

[2] This cannot be said to be certainly known, though it is so stated by some writers. The expenditure of ammunition had been enormous; Thiers gives it as 60,000 rounds for the cannon, and 1,400,000 cartridges for the infantry; and it might well have needed time to bring up enough for another such day. A week later Napoleon had barely enough for assaulting the Russian intrenchments before Moscow, if they had been defended. Berthier to Murat, in Chambray, iii. 415.

that number.[1] This is of course absurd; the circumstances of the battle were such that the losses could not be very unequal, while they were enormously heavy. Some of the authorities merely give a figure for the whole, without attempting to apportion between the two armies; but the balance of testimony, as of probability, is in favour of the Russians having suffered somewhat the more. The Russians cannot have lost less than 40,000,[2] and the French loss was considerably over 30,000. Since the total engaged amounted to rather less than 250,000 in all, the day cost not much short of a third of the whole in killed and wounded—prisoners there were but few on either side. No battle of modern times, no encounter since the days before gunpowder, when the beaten side could be cut down *ad libitum* by the victors and quarter was seldom given, has witnessed such awful slaughter. Large figures, however, are less impressive than more individual instances: on the French side Ney and Murat were the only officers of rank who engaged in the thick of the fighting and remained unhurt, and on the Russian side the similar casualties were almost equally numerous.

"The hideous and useless butchery of Borodino" is the phrase of a great master of the English language. Hideous it certainly was: on hardly any scene of human slaughter have the dead lain thicker than around the great redoubt; and over the whole of the limited area of the field every acre must have had at least a score of men and

[1] The same falsehoods occur in his letter of the ninth of September to the Emperor of Austria. Nap. Corr. 19,183.

[2] Clausewitz says that the Russian army marched through Moscow 70,000 strong. This would make the loss at Borodino more than 40,000, if the estimate given above of their numbers before the battle be correct.

horses lying cold and stiff, or writhing in the agony of their wounds. And a butchery it was; the whole battle consisted in sheer hard fighting, with slight advantages of ground to the weaker side, but with none of the grand tactical strokes which make a day like Austerlitz or Ramillies decisive without being murderous at any rate to the victors. Whether it can be fairly called useless may be doubted, except to the nominal conqueror. Napoleon certainly deserves that title: the enemy had been dislodged from their position, and, as it proved, left the way open to Moscow. So much he might have attained by manœuvring; more he could not attain unless the courage of his enemies gave way. Without the brave men who fell at Borodino Napoleon could not possibly attempt any further offensive movement, when his occupation of Moscow led to no overtures for peace. Without them, he was substantially inferior in force when at length the inevitable retreat began. The Russian Te Deums, chanted for the victory that Kutusov falsely claimed, were n truth only premature.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOSCOW.

The Russian retreat on Moscow was conducted steadily and without haste; it was not till the thirteenth of September that the army found itself outside the walls of the capital. Clausewitz, who was with the rear-guard commanded by Miloradovich, says that the French usually came up in the afternoon, but did not press, except on one occasion, when both sides lost a good many men. Napoleon has been criticised for not pursuing more vigorously; a sharp pursuit, it is said, would have completely disorganised the retreating enemy, and enabled him to seize Kaluga and Tula. The Emperor, however, was in no condition to press on vigorously. He thought it necessary to leave Junot at Borodino to guard and superintend the vast hospitals which had their headquarters at a large convent near the field: the scale of the task may be judged from the fact which Thiers mentions, that three days elapsed before all the wounded had received even a first dressing to their hurts. Moreover, the essential arm for an active pursuit was exactly that in which he was now most deficient. Borodino had been, as a Russian eye-witness phrased it, the grave of the French cavalry. Thousands of horses had been killed, thousands more wounded; and time was needed before any of the latter could be used again. Nor was there any

prospect of obtaining remounts except by the laborious process of bringing them up from central Europe. Napoleon also had reason to expect another battle before Moscow. He knew perfectly well, notwithstanding the falsehoods in his bulletins, that he had not crushed the Russians at Borodino; nay, he must have realised that the greater loss he had inflicted was more or less neutralised by the fact that the enemy was retiring towards his resources, while he was leaving his own further and further behind. The only reasonable and prudent course was that which he adopted, to keep his army well in hand, to hasten up from the rear whatever supplies and reinforcements were within reach, and to follow the enemy up steadily without wasting men in attempting to press him.

Kutusov on the other hand is blamed for not having retired southwards towards Kaluga, where, it is said, he would have been on the flank of Napoleon advancing to Moscow. Apart from the fact that all his supplies were in Moscow or coming thither, this would really have been playing into Napoleon's hands; it would have left him free to inflict the great blow to Russian prestige abroad, and to patriotic sentiment at home, involved in the hostile occupation of the capital, while employing practically all his military strength against Kutusov, or at pleasure watching him with a containing force. Kutusov's only course was to retreat on Moscow, whether he fought again in its defence or not. At what date he made up his mind that Moscow could not be defended is not clear; certain it is that he announced day after day his determination to fight again, which may of course have been only to prevent consternation in Moscow, and that he caused intrenchments

to be thrown up in the last position west of the city where a battle could have been accepted. It is at least possible that he would have fought if an adequate position had been available, and that he decided to abandon Moscow only when he found that there was no position which would compensate him for his inferiority of numbers. It would have been perfectly feasible to make a street fight of it, as Duke Eugene of Wurtemberg argues, and so to have inflicted enormous losses on the French. But this would have been to destroy the city, most of the houses being of wood; and it is obvious that the Russian generals were most anxious to save it, and took great pains to let the French entry, if inevitable, be unopposed.

Whether his own mind was already made up or not, Kutusov summoned a council of war on the evening of the thirteenth, so that his principal officers might share in the responsibility of the final decision. According to the circumstantial account given by Buturlin,[1] this formed an exception to the supposed general rule that councils of war are against fighting. Bennigsen and Dokhturov were for accepting battle where they were; Konovnitsin, Ostermann, and Yermolov wished to retrace their steps, attack the French where they could, and fight to the death; Barclay advised retreating still further east on Vladimir; Toll suggested moving south-west on Kaluga. Kutusov was of course not bound by any advice; he decided on retreating, but by a line intermediate between those recommended by his second in command and his

[1] Chambray (ii. 265) gives Barclay's account of this council, which does not agree closely with Buturlin's. Barclay gives the names of the generals present, and the opinions expressed, a little differently; but the general purport is the same, though the details differ.

quartermaster-general. There can be no doubt that his decision was sound: the army was indispensable to the Empire; Moscow was not, if the nation had courage to stand the blow. It would have been madness to expend the army on a battle in which the odds were seriously against it, for the faint chance of preserving the capital. It is obvious now, though according to Clausewitz the Russian officers were far from understanding it at the time, that, whatever they did, Napoleon's occupation of Moscow could be but temporary, unless the Tzar gave way; and if so, the stronger the Russian army the more disastrous they could make his retreat. There can be no doubt also that the direction of the retreat was the best, though it is likely enough that Kutusov did not see this clearly at the moment, and merely adopted a compromise which turned out successful. Further east than Moscow Napoleon would not pursue: to move on Kaluga would have been giving him full intimation of the Russian plans, even if it had been feasible to do so with the advancing French already almost on the Moscow end of the road. From the direction of Kolomna it was easy to work round to the south of Moscow, especially if the Cossacks were successful in masking the Russian movements. Whether Kutusov had seen this before or not, he was easily persuaded to take this course by Toll, who had throughout advocated a move towards Kaluga.

The evacuation of Moscow was begun the same night, but as the streets and roads outside were choked with the flight of the inhabitants, not much progress had been made when the French cavalry appeared before the western gate. Miloradovich sought an interview with Murat, in order to propose a kind of armistice while the Russians

evacuated the city, threatening, if his proposal was not accepted, to contest every street, to the inevitable destruction of much of the city. Chambray[1] represents this as if the purpose of the Russian was simply to gain time for withdrawing trains of supplies and collecting stragglers, that otherwise must have fallen into the hands of the enemy. This result was attained, and was no great price for the French to pay, in return for having the city abandoned to them without further fighting; but there can be no real doubt that the object on which the Russians laid great stress was the preservation of Moscow. Murat apparently deemed it beneath his dignity to confer with a mere general, but after some delay Miloradovich came to an agreement with General Sebastiani, who commanded the enemy's advanced guard. The French were naturally quite as anxious to obtain full possession of the prize now within their reach as the Russians were to save their holy city. Nor was there any difficulty in preventing hostilities, when at the expiration of the appointed time the Russian rear-guard had failed to get away.

Early on the fifteenth Napoleon made his entry into Moscow, and was much disconcerted to find the city almost deserted. He had entered other capitals in triumph, and had always been met by local authorities coming submissively forward to tender the keys of the city, if not by crowds who from fear or interest acclaimed his arrival. Municipal business, the usual police of the streets, had always within his experience been carried on by the ordinary functionaries in the ordinary methods, if subject to the conqueror's control. From Moscow most of the inhabitants, practically all who enjoyed rank or station,

[1] Chambray, ii. 113.

had disappeared. The nobles, who mostly dwelt in Moscow for part of the year only, were all absent, together with their vast retinues of serfs, either because this was their usual season for living on their country domains, or having deliberately departed. The bulk of the citizens had been led to believe that their lives and property would not be safe if the French came, or had simply obeyed Count Rostopchin, the governor, who had done his best to clear the city. Few were left except some foreign shopkeepers, and the lowest class of citizens who had little or nothing to lose. Napoleon however would not be baulked of his ceremonial, and insisted on a deputation being scraped together, which consisted of French shopkeepers, to tender submission in the name of Moscow. This dismal farce did not alter the facts: he was really worse off than if the city had been entirely uninhabited. Many prisoners had been released, so that the forces of disorder were augmented, while all semblance of municipal authority had vanished. The invaders had to find their own way about, to discover for themselves where were stowed the riches which they hoped to plunder, the stores on which they hoped once more to live in abundance. The troops were distributed in and outside the city with an eye to military convenience, and efforts were made, not to prevent plundering—that was hopeless when armed men who had long been half-starved were in occupation of an empty city—but to repress disorder and stop wilful mischief.

Napoleon had scarcely established himself in the Kremlin, at once the citadel, the palace, and the sanctuary of Moscow, before a fire broke out in a large store containing spirits belonging to the government. The flames were with difficulty extinguished, but this had hardly been done

before the great bazaar lying north-east of the Kremlin was found to be on fire. In the night the wind rose suddenly —the equinox was at hand—and blowing from the east carried the conflagration across the finest streets of the city, and gave it a firm hold on the outermost ring of wooden houses. Then a change in the wind brought the flames back, till the Kremlin was in imminent danger, and Napoleon was forced to take up his quarters at a château two or three miles from the city. For three whole days all efforts to control the fire were vain: the army had to abandon their prize, and bivouac in the open country outside the gates. Then the equinoctial rains began, the wind lulled, and the conflagration gradually came to an end, after having destroyed most part of the city. The Kremlin had by great efforts been saved from destruction, though not from injury.

Few historical points have been more discussed than the question how and why Moscow was burned; few better illustrate some peculiarities of historical evidence. It is quite certain that it was not the frenzied patriotism of the Russian nation, preferring to destroy their own sacred city rather than let the invader desecrate it. The grief and rage of Tzar, army, and people, the outcry against the French as the authors of the fire, were too obviously genuine; indeed, as has been shown, special pains were taken when the army evacuated Moscow to avert the risk of such a disaster. It is equally clear that it was not owing to the deliberate brutality of the invaders, to whom Russian sentiment not unnaturally ascribed it: they had the strongest interest in preserving the city so long as they continued to occupy it. The question is whether the conflagration was accidental, or the act of Count Rostopchin, the

governor, unauthorised by the Tzar. He, it is said, in a fury of patriotism determined to sacrifice the city, as he had already sacrificed one of his own country houses, as three weeks later he fired with his own hands another country house which Kutusov's movements left exposed to French occupation. For this purpose he got rid of most of the inhabitants, including all the well-to-do classes, and then employed the lowest of the low to set fire to the city in all quarters as soon as the French were in possession. There is no doubt that contemporaries believed in Rostopchin's responsibility, of which he himself made no secret. Chambray, who carefully states that he gives the current opinion, without vouching for its truth, even says that Kutusov was aware of the governor's purpose, and that his repeated declarations of his intention to fight again were uttered mainly to deceive Rostopchin, and prevent his firing the city before the army had passed through. Buturlin, who represents the official Russian view, attributes the scheme to Rostopchin personally, though he does not hint at Kutusov's privity to it. Sir Robert Wilson, who rejoined the Russian army on the twenty-third, and was constantly in Rostopchin's company, confirms Chambray's view, even saying that Rostopchin would never forgive Kutusov for deceiving him. And Wilson's testimony is all the more important because his narrative, based on journals written from day to day and completed soon afterwards, was not published for many years, so that it formed no part of the materials open to the earlier narrators.

Nevertheless, all rests on Rostopchin's own word, and he some years afterwards published a formal denial of the whole story. As he was then an exile living in France, he may have sought thus to cast off the odium of an act which

all about him, and possibly he himself on reflection, deemed atrocious. But it is obvious that a man who would thus contradict himself might well have falsely claimed the credit at a time when he expected that the act would be deemed heroic; and putting aside Rostopchin's own testimony, which cancels itself, the evidence of facts is but slight, and the inferences to be drawn from some of them point the other way. The French at the time certainly believed that the fire was the work of incendiaries employed by Rostopchin; sundry Russians of the lowest class were seized and hanged as such; but this proves nothing whatever. It is no unheard-of thing for marauders during a great fire to help it on, in order that they may plunder more readily. It is said that they declared, on being questioned, that the governor had employed them; but this might have been said falsely as an excuse, even if the French ever really understood what they said. Nor does it appear what motive Rostopchin's supposed agents could have had for carrying out his instructions, at a risk to themselves, when once his back was turned. The richer quarters were empty, and they could rob to their hearts' content without beginning by kindling fires on an extensive scale. Another fact difficult to reconcile with the Rostopchin theory is that there was a vast mass of gunpowder stored in the Kremlin; to have blown that up would have been infinitely easier, and more effectual. On the other hand, there was plenty of occasion for fires due to recklessness of the worst kind. Clausewitz mentions having noticed more than one as the rear-guard filed out of Moscow, which he attributed to the Cossacks, who had got into the habit during the long retreat of plundering and destroying what otherwise would be abandoned to the enemy. Napoleon's

soldiers were accustomed to similar excesses. The criminals in the gaols had been let loose when the city was abandoned, and they were likely enough to cause fires in the houses they plundered, without any deliberate intention. In a city largely built of wood a conflagration spreads easily, and the wind, which shifted its direction more than once, contributed to an extent obviously incalculable. On the face of the undoubted facts there is no adequate evidence that the burning of Moscow was deliberate, though there is of course no evidence that it was not. The case against Count Rostopchin rests mainly on the fact that his contemporaries believed it, chiefly on his own avowal, and refused to believe his subsequent denial.

Whatever the real cause of the conflagration, there is no doubt that its consequences have been greatly exaggerated. If indeed the city had been entirely destroyed, it would have been a blessing in disguise to Napoleon, for in that case he must have departed at once, and if he had retreated on Lithuania, the only really feasible course, might have saved most part of his army. Nor would he take the warning which the event, as he undoubtedly understood it, and as it may have been in fact, was calculated to convey. If the Russian nation, or even a high official, was willing to burn Moscow rather than let him occupy it, there was not the least prospect of their making an ignominious peace to purchase his withdrawal. Materially, though the waste of property was immense, the injury done to the invaders was not very serious. Enough of the city was left to shelter such portions of the army as could with due regard to military requirements be kept within the walls, and the Russian habit of laying in great stores for winter use made the supplies still left adequate in most respects. Narratives

abound, written by Frenchmen who shared in the occupation of Moscow, and lived to escape out of Russia. They all tell the same tale, that luxuries were plentiful, though necessaries ran short. The palaces of the nobles had cellars full of costly wines; there was any quantity of such things as sugar and preserved fruits, but comparatively little flour. The soldiers quartered within the city had all these things for the taking, and kept them to themselves. When men from outside managed to come into Moscow and forage for themselves, they had to fight for their plunder, and were repeatedly robbed of it by the men of the guard and of the 1st corps.[1] Discipline was greatly relaxed; the regimental officers could get nothing for themselves or their men except by plunder, and naturally gave way to the temptation. More than one officer who wrote his memoirs afterwards describes with an air of complacency how he provided himself for the retreat, even to the extent of appropriating a stock of French books wherewith to amuse himself in winter quarters. Still luxuries did not fully compensate for the lack of more solid things. Fresh meat could under any circumstances have been procured only from the surrounding country, apart from Napoleon's own stores brought up from the rear. The Emperor, who returned to the Kremlin on the twentieth, made efforts to induce the inhabitants to return, and the country people to bring things to market, which according to Thiers he proposed to pay for in forged paper roubles. The inhabitants however were out of reach of his proclamations, and nothing could be procured except by force, and very little even in that way. For meat the army had mainly to depend on the droves of cattle which had followed its

[1] Fezensac, 244. The same thing is told in other narratives.

march, and which were now becoming exhausted. The troops, especially those stationed outside Moscow, had to suffer considerable hardships,[1] but this was largely due to Napoleon himself, who would hardly allow the great stores to be touched. Just after the fire Berthier reported that a division of the 4th corps had no food at all, and asked for authority to issue to them a little flour; the Emperor wrote across the paper, "Réfusé."[2] Where it was in his judgment possible for the soldiers to feed themselves, they must do it or take the consequences. Forage was still more difficult to procure, and the horses suffered accordingly; nor were any forthcoming to replace them.

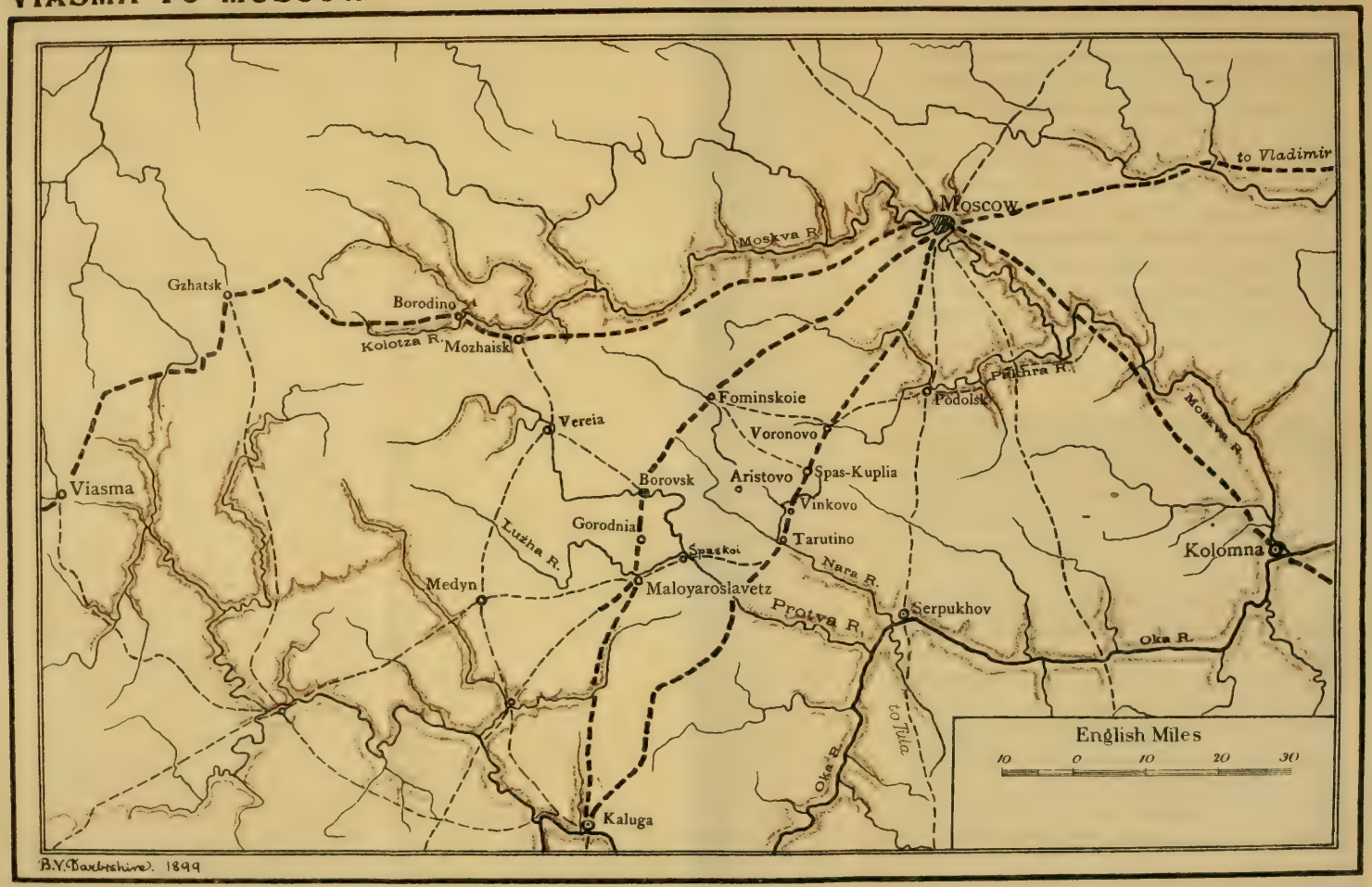
The retreat, when it came, was crippled seriously by the short number and bad condition of the horses, but this in no way interfered with the French sojourn in Moscow, nor had the fire any bearing on it. Some writers argue that Napoleon, if Moscow had not been deserted, might through the inhabitants have made himself known to the Russian people, have induced the serfs to revolt, and so destroyed the Empire. Seeing what the Russians then were in ideas and education, or rather in the lack of them, it is scarcely conceivable that his propaganda should have been understood by a single peasant or accepted by a single merchant. But again it was not the fire which interfered, but the previous flight of the inhabitants. It may indeed be argued that in one important respect the desertion of Moscow by the bulk of the population told in Napoleon's favour. If they had stayed they would have been entitled to protection against plunder; and though doubtless they would have been very imperfectly protected, and would

[1] Fezensac, 247.

[2] Berthier's letter is given in Chambray, iii. 406.

have suffered much at the hands of the soldiery, the invaders would not have had every item of property in Moscow at their mercy. There would probably have been infinitely less waste, but certainly there would have been much smaller supplies for the French to consume during their stay and carry off at their departure. And even if it be admitted that on the whole the fire told more to the detriment of Napoleon than the uncontrolled possession of everything that Moscow contained told in his favour, it is idle to pretend that it had a decisive effect on his fortunes. The really disastrous thing about Moscow was the rooted belief which Napoleon cherished that his occupation of it must cause Russia to sue for peace; but for this he might have been back on the Berezina before the first snowflake fell.

Two days' march from Moscow the Kolomna road crosses the Moskva, close to its junction with the Pakhra, a large stream which flows eastwards at a distance averaging about sixteen miles from Moscow. Kutusov on the seventeenth of September changed the direction of his march, and took the road westwards, protected by the Pakhra, till he reached the Moscow-Kaluga road. Here he took up a position behind the river, with his advanced guard pushed forward to Desna, nearly half-way to Moscow; at the same time he sent Dorkhov with a considerable force of cavalry towards Mozhaisk. Kutusov had to a certain extent masked the original direction of his retreat, by covering with Cossacks or other cavalry most of the roads leading out of Moscow. The French were in serious need of rest, especially for the horses, and it may be assumed also that the great fire occupied much of their attention. Hence it was not till the twenty-third that Murat, who now rightly supposed



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the bulk of the Russian army to have retired by the Kolomna road, discovered that they had quitted it, and began to follow them westwards. Napoleon on hearing it sent Bessières with a division of Davout's corps and some cavalry straight on Desna, while Murat, taking the direct road from Podolsk, threatened to turn the Russian right flank. Kutusov was urged to attack Murat, who might certainly have been crushed unless he could have decamped fast enough. But the marshal, with Bessières in front and Murat to the right, thought that perhaps he had the whole French army upon him, and preferred to retreat towards Kaluga. Napoleon on hearing of the Russian position behind the Pakhra gave Murat also the 5th corps, and bade him push Kutusov back. He saw that he could not be safe in Moscow with the enemy in force so near his only line of communications, and was prepared if necessary to use his whole strength to drive him away. In fact orders were issued on the twenty-eighth for the army to march that night for Podolsk, to the great joy of the many who were uneasy at the halt in Moscow. Kutusov's deliberate retreat to double his former distance from Moscow caused this movement to be countermanded. Napoleon had attained his immediate object: he spread his troops over more of the country round Moscow for the sake of better supplies, and especially of more space for procuring forage, and left Murat to watch Kutusov for nearly three weeks.

Both generals are severely blamed for their inaction, especially by Chambray, and not without some reason. Kutusov's army was by the beginning of October fairly equal in numbers to Napoleon's. It was still somewhat weaker in infantry, the most important arm on the battle-field, but

it was decidedly stronger in regular cavalry, and it had also a large number of Cossacks, of infinite value for the minor operations of war. If Kutusov had boldly moved upon Mozhaisk, thereby cutting Napoleon's communications, he would, as may be judged after the event, have reduced him to desperate straits. But it may fairly be questioned whether it was in fact worth while running the risk, and it is still more doubtful whether the knowledge which Kutusov then possessed justified his incurring it. A general endowed with Napoleon's extraordinary fertility of resource is never so formidable as when driven to extremities. The French troops were all veterans, whereas the Russian reinforcements were largely new levies, not yet inured to war. Nor could Kutusov know with any certainty what the enemy's numbers were: he did know that his own were growing, and that therefore delay was in his favour. From every point of view, time was fighting on the side of Russia. Every day brought the winter nearer, the auxiliary which would go far to destroy the invaders even if the Russians stood aloof. Kutusov's age and character rendered him averse to bold strokes: he preferred attaining his end by the minimum of action and risk. When the French retreat was in progress he certainly overdid this caution; during Napoleon's stay in Moscow his inaction was intelligible, if not justifiable. A younger and bolder general in his place, Miloradovich or Konovnitsin for instance, might perhaps have brought about the destruction of the entire French army, but he might possibly also have sustained a defeat risking everything.

Napoleon's mistake is more obvious: it was not however military, but political, or rather moral. It was probably the amazing success of his career which inclined him to the

fatal error of assuming that events would turn out in the way that suited himself best. Whatever is at variance with his wishes or interest ought not to exist, and therefore he tends to persuade himself that it does not exist. There is no trace of this in his earlier history; it can perhaps be first seen in his obstinate optimism about the war in Spain, and it was an important cause of his failure in his last campaign.[1] This temper may be seen everywhere in the invasion of Russia, as for instance in his anger that Lithuania did not do more for his service. Because he had overrun the country, he assumes that it is definitely his, and must be devoted to his cause. His letters to Maret at Vilna[2] are couched in terms of angry disgust that he should have to leave garrisons in Vilna, Minsk, etc., *comme dans les villes ennemies*, that these towns do not protect themselves against the Cossacks, that the regiment of Lithuanian nobles which he had been pleased to add (on paper) to his guard obtained so few recruits. At Moscow Napoleon's readiness to believe that what he desired was bound to come to pass was a direct cause, not of the failure of his expedition—that had long been inevitable—but of the destruction of his army. He had convinced himself that as soon as he was in possession of Moscow the Tzar would give in. Further, he was under the delusion that Sweden and Turkey would both attack Russia on hearing the news of Borodino, and so relieve him of any anxiety about his flanks. As a matter of fact neither anticipation had ever a chance of being realised, but Napoleon could not bring

[1] If Napoleon had not assumed after Ligny that Blucher must have retreated eastwards away from Wellington, the battle of Waterloo might have been won; at any rate it would not have been a crushing and irretrievable defeat.

[2] *E.g.*, Nap. Corr. 19,135—9, 19,234.

himself to believe this, and lingered on week after week in the vain hope that each day might bring from the Tzar overtures for peace.

Napoleon, however, was not so confident of peace as not to take any available step which might open communications with the Tzar, and so expedite the proposals he expected. Immediately on his re-entry into Moscow he despatched to Alexander, by one of the few Russian gentlemen who had remained in the city, a letter[1] which Thiers characterises as *à la fois courtoise et hautaine*, but which equally deserves very different epithets. In it he complains of the burning of Moscow as *atroce et sans but*, and carefully records the amount of ammunition, etc., which he had seized. In it he declares the war to be purely political, capable of being terminated at a word of goodwill: whereas all the time he was looking, as he had done throughout, for opportunities of giving it a peculiarly atrocious character by urging the peasants to revolt.[2] Naturally there is nothing definite about peace; this would have betrayed too obviously his eagerness for it. At the same time the Tzar, if he had desired to open negotiations, might easily have replied in such a manner as to imply his willingness to treat.

A fortnight passed without any overtures on the part of the Tzar, or any reply to this letter. Then Napoleon determined on a more direct step. He sent Lauriston, his

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,213.

[2] Napoleon after his return to Paris had the effrontery to state publicly that he could have raised the majority of the Russian population against the government, by proclaiming the emancipation of the serfs, and that he abstained on grounds of humanity! On another occasion he asserted that all the middle class, and all the serfs except those on the imperial domains, were in his favour.

last ambassador to St. Petersburg before the war, to seek an interview with Kutusov on an errand professedly military, but with instructions to work the conversation round in the direction of peace. To understand what took place at this interview it is necessary to glance at the state of feeling in Russia, and especially at the attitude of the Tzar.

The long-continued retreat of the armies, necessary as it was, and wise under the circumstances, had greatly discouraged the Russians, who very naturally could not see the successful upshot to which, as we can now discern, the policy of retreat was steadily tending. The discontent, chiefly of the nobles, was expressed in the agitation which led Alexander to put Kutusov over Barclay's head. The first hasty report of Borodino claimed a victory, which raised public enthusiasm to a high pitch. Kutusov's later and fuller report[1] to the Tzar, it is only fair to say, gave something near the true state of the case. It reported the battle as drawn, estimated the enemy's loss as probably the greater, in consequence of his own position having been intrenched—an inference not unreasonable, though apparently not correct—and explained his retreat by the need of reorganisation after such enormous losses. This further report does not seem to have been made public; perhaps the Tzar thought that under all the circumstances it was as near a victory as could be expected. Hence the general discouragement was all the greater when it was announced that Moscow had not been defended. In the main army there was a wide-spread, though by no means universal, feeling of despondency. Clausewitz tells that when he took leave of Barclay de Tolly on the eighth of October to go to

[1] Danilevski, ii. 233.

an appointment at Riga, that general expressed his conviction that no good would come of the war. Kutusov, as will be seen, was so little confident that he was ready to listen to Lauriston favourably, in spite of the Tzar's prohibition. In St. Petersburg there was some alarm, but no cessation of effort, and no outcry for peace. Individuals in high places, notably the Empress Dowager and her second son Constantine, were anxious for peace; but the nobility in general, who constituted such public opinion as existed, do not seem to have shared these views. Preparations were made for disastrous contingencies. State papers were sent out of reach of a possible French advance on St. Petersburg. The Tzar spoke to Lord Cathcart about confiding his fleet to the care of England, which in fact was done. But all these were rational precautions, not signs of fear, and it is not unreasonable to ascribe the maintenance of a spirit undaunted by disaster to the personal influence of the Tzar. Historians have argued from some of his later conduct that he was dreamy and little fitted by nature to hold firmly to a purpose, and that therefore the resolution to continue the war to the uttermost must have been inspired by stronger spirits. No doubt some of the men about him, notably Stein, were unshaken by the disasters of the campaign, and confident of ultimate success if Russia held out. But there is no evidence whatever that they overruled the Tzar's weaker nature. Alexander was not a great soldier; some of the instructions sent to distant armies betray ignorance of the fundamental principle that, while a general may reasonably be told at what end to aim, the means to be adopted must be left mainly to his discretion. He lacked either the penetration to discern, or the courage peremptorily to put

down, the personal jealousies and intrigues which were rampant in his court. But all the evidence seems to show that from first to last he never wavered in his adherence to his original resolution. How much retreat before the invader might be necessary or expedient was a matter of detail rather than principle. Disasters might be suffered, but they must be borne. Nothing should induce him to swerve from the determination expressed at the outset, never to treat while there were enemies on Russian soil. His proclamation to his subjects[1] after the fall of Moscow is doubtless open to the charge of misleading them, in that it endorses Kutusov's very rose-coloured version of the state of things; but nevertheless it breathes a spirit of fortitude and patriotism which deserved to produce a great effect both in Russia and in Europe generally. Just at the same time Alexander, in commissioning Count Lieven for the embassy to London, expressed in the most formal way his determination not merely to expel the invaders, but to deliver Europe from Napoleon's yoke. This is Count Lieven's note of his master's language: "J'ai choisi ce moment même pour vous envoyer à Londres, afin de mieux constater par là ma ferme volonté de ne pas faire la paix, tant que je n'aurai pas refoulé l'ennemi hors de nos frontières, dussé-je, avant d'y parvenir, me retirer au delà de Cazan. Tant que j'aurai à defendre le territoire russe, je ne réclame de l'Angleterre que des munitions et des armes. Lorsque avec l'aide de la Providence j'aurai repoussé l'ennemi hors de nos frontières, je ne m'arrêterai pas là, et ce n'est qu'alors que je m'entendrai avec l'Angleterre sur l'assistance plus efficace que j'aurai à rèclamer d'elle, pour parvenir à libérer l'Europe du joug français."

[1] Printed in Chambray, ii. 137.

Brave words these for a sovereign with an enemy in possession of his capital, and well calculated by their disinterestedness to inspire confidence. Nor were these declarations meant for England alone. About the same date Count Lieven, who having been ambassador at Berlin was well known to Hardenberg, wrote to the latter at the Tzar's dictation a letter containing the same assurances, which were to be passed on to Vienna. The man who could use such language under such circumstances might hesitate or err as to means, where he necessarily had to depend on advice; but his grasp of the end to be attained was perfectly firm.

Under these conditions it was a foregone conclusion that Lauriston's mission would not lead to peace. The fact that Kutusov consented to see him at all was a disaster for Napoleon, since it postponed for a fortnight the date at which he became finally convinced that he would not return in peace from Moscow. Hence French writers have been misled into supposing that Kutusov wilfully caused the delay in order to lull his enemy into security until the winter should be at hand. Thiers tells an absurd romance how that Kutusov declined to see Lauriston on his arrival, and sent Prince Volkhonski instead — that Lauriston haughtily refused to meet any subordinate, and went back to Murat's lines—that the Russian staff were some of them frightened at this, while the partisans of war to the knife saw their opportunity of entrapping the French, so that all joined in begging Kutusov to see Lauriston—that the marshal accordingly had a long conversation with him, the gist of which is given, though no one else was present —that Kutusov finally agreed that Volkhonski should go at once to take the Tzar's pleasure, and that meanwhile

the outposts were not to fire on each other, though there was no formal armistice. The facts however, unless we are to disbelieve the only actor in the affair who has given an account of it, were very different. Sir Robert Wilson[1] says that he being at the front received an urgent summons from Bennigsen to head-quarters. Kutusov's subordinates had found out that he had promised to meet Lauriston that night outside the Russian lines. This they regarded as so suspicious that they had resolved, if Kutusov kept his appointment, to deprive him of the command, and they wished Wilson, who had just brought to the army messages from the Tzar as to his unshaken resolution, to be their spokesman. Wilson, not being under Kutusov's authority, was the natural person to undertake this unpleasant task. He found the marshal really inclined for peace, being apparently far from confident of being strong enough to overwhelm Napoleon, and afraid to run the risk of failure. Hence he persisted in his purpose, but ultimately yielded when also pressed by the Tzar's two kinsmen, the Duke of Oldenburg and Alexander of Wurtemberg, so far as to receive Lauriston publicly. A private conference followed, the upshot of which was that Kutusov, in contravention of the Tzar's positive declaration that there should be no treating with the enemy, agreed to convey to his master Napoleon's letter, if letter there was[2]—at any rate, the vague proposals brought by Lauriston. At the same time Kutusov declared that he had no power to agree to an armistice.

[1] The account given to the world in his narrative is substantially identical with that in his report at the time to the English ambassador at St. Petersburg. Cathcart to Castlereagh, the eighteenth of October, R. O. Russia, 201.

[2] There is no trace in Napoleon's Correspondence of any letter to the Tzar about this time.

As a matter of fact there were no hostilities for a fortnight, and the outposts had a certain amount of friendly intercourse—a thing which fairly often has happened when two armies are facing each other and both are for the time quiescent. On one of these days Bennigsen met Murat at the latter's request, and gathered from the conversation that certainly Murat himself, and probably the French generally, were extremely anxious for peace. Naturally the astute Russian was only strengthened in the opinion he had held throughout, that the true policy was to persist; but he does not seem to have been confidential in his turn. Napoleon was playing the Russians' game for them; every day made the ultimate catastrophe more inevitable.

Alexander made no reply whatever to the French overtures, though he wrote to Kutusov a letter containing a severe reprimand for having received Lauriston in defiance of positive orders, a renewed formal prohibition to have any communication with the enemy, and a repetition of his unalterable determination not to treat. Napoleon could not admit to himself that he was beaten; to retreat unsuccessful, even if the operation were carried out without disaster, would be to confess before all Europe that he had met his match; his dominion rested on fear of his military strength, and if that fear were removed, would collapse like a house of cards. Some sort of preparations for evacuating Moscow had been ordered. The question in which direction to move had been much considered, but no final resolution had been taken, when a forward step on the part of Kutusov precipitated matters.

Reconnaissances had satisfied the Russians that Murat's force, which lay before their position at Tarutino, was not

supported by the bulk of the French army, and that moreover it was ill posted for defence. Bennigsen and Toll therefore urged Kutusov to assail Murat in force, and so put an end to inaction. The Russian superiority in numbers over Murat's dangerously isolated army was so great, that a determined attack if properly made ought to destroy it altogether. Kutusov was reluctant to abandon his policy of doing nothing, partly due to his own lack of energy; but he assented to the plan, gave Bennigsen the charge of part of his army for the active blow, and brought the whole up in support.

The Russian army lay behind the river Nara, near where its course makes a right angle, with an advanced guard holding the village of Tarutino on the north of it; and the position, though far from unassailable, was secure from surprise. Murat, having to watch the Russians, had posted his little army some five or six miles to the north of Tarutino, along a stream tributary to the Nara. The combat which ensued is sometimes called after this stream the Chernishnia, sometimes after the hamlet of Vinkovo, occupied by Murat's centre. The space he occupied was not suited to serve as a battle position, and was also too great for his numbers, which little exceeded 20,000 men. His left rested on nothing, and was further endangered by the fact that the Russians held some woods close in front of it. Bennigsen's plan, ably conceived and well executed so far as it depended on him, was to attack Murat's left with two infantry corps, while a large body of cavalry turned it and seized the road behind the French lines, where at Spas Kuplia it passed through a defile between two woods. This point once firmly held, Murat would be cut from his only line of retreat, and might probably be annihilated, or forced to

surrender. Murat, lulled into security perhaps by his knowledge of Lauriston's errand, and by the practical cessation of all hostilities,[1] was not sufficiently alert for a position which was extremely dangerous at the best. Early on the eighteenth of October, Orlov Denisov's cavalry completely surprised Sebastiani, who was on Murat's extreme left, put him to flight with serious loss, and succeeded in occupying Spas Kuplia. Meanwhile Baggovut was pressing vigorously in front, and Murat's line had to retreat hastily. If Kutusov had pushed forward his other corps, which were within striking distance, nothing could have saved Murat. The marshal however disregarded Bennigsen's urgent requests for support, and Murat, who did all that courage and energy could effect to redeem his fault, was able to stop the Russian advance by unsparing use of the cavalry which formed his second line, and then to recover Spas Kuplia, Orlov Denisov being unsupported. The affair cost him over 3,000 men, mostly cavalry, and thirty-six guns; it was only Kutusov's inertness that saved him from destruction. Plausible apology might be made for not fighting at all: a conspicuous advantage would have been gained by crushing Murat, all the more important because his force comprised the bulk of Napoleon's cavalry, already far too weak. For the course which he actually pursued no kind of excuse is discoverable.

This disaster, which though not overwhelming indicated very serious danger if the Russians resumed activity,

[1] There is no ground for imputing treachery to the Russians because they gave no notice of resuming hostilities. Not only had Kutusov formally refused any armistice; there had been an attack by Cossacks at the same point on the seventh.

finally decided Napoleon to quit Moscow. A variety of plans had been before his mind, all open to very grave objections in themselves, and all compromised by the long delay. He had thought of advancing upon St. Petersburg, since the Tzar did not sue for peace immediately on the loss of his other capital. According to Baron Fain,[1] Napoleon worked out on the night of the sixteenth of October a complete scheme for an immediate move of this kind, and only abandoned it in consequence of the strong disapproval of his marshals. Fain however discredits his own story, by telling how Napoleon wound up the discussion with a prophecy that the Russians would not make peace,—it being absolutely certain that the Emperor himself was the person who most obstinately clung to the dream that the loss of Moscow would make Russia yield. Whether under any circumstances an advance on St. Petersburg would have been feasible may be doubted. To keep open communications to Moscow was hard enough; to carry them on for several hundred miles more, at nearly a right angle to the rest of the line, would have been hopeless; and to establish a new line of communication altogether, through country totally unknown, would have been equally difficult. Moreover, whatever might have been done had the Russians abandoned Moscow without a battle, Borodino had made all the difference: the frightful losses of that day could never be recouped. The army more or less expected to winter in Moscow, and Daru strongly advocated so doing. Rapp says that Napoleon called this "conseil du lion," but it would have been slow suicide to adopt it. There were probably enough provisions in the city to supply the soldiers through the winter, at any rate with

[1] Manuscrit de 1812, ii. 93.

the addition of what might have been accumulated from the rear; but not a horse would have been alive when spring returned, and Napoleon would have been virtually besieged, cut off from France for nearly six months—time enough for the whole face of Europe to change. Retreat in some direction was the only thing possible: the question was which direction to take.

Napoleon's own memorandum,[1] if it be really his, lends some support to the theory that his military genius was under eclipse at Moscow. It states with admirable clearness the conditions required for an ideal scheme of action, and then proceeds to expound a plan which fulfils none of them, which could not have been carried out in double the time allowed (his own army was to move about 275 miles, the advanced portion in ten days, the whole within fourteen), and which assumed the enemy to be incapable of doing anything all the while. This precious scheme, which was to place the army in two masses fifty miles apart, some way north-east of Vitepsk, in a poor and difficult country, still Russian and therefore presumably as hostile as ever, had the merit that it was supposed to threaten St. Petersburg. It may well be that this gave it favour with Napoleon, who above all things sought not to appear to give way, who habitually said, and apparently thought, that he was a triumphant conqueror to whom nothing but a confident and aggressive attitude was befitting. Something remotely resembling this, a direct retreat on Vitepsk, was in Jomini's opinion the best course available. It was

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,237. It is undated, though internal evidence proves the date to be early in October; and it is unsigned, but the editors of the Correspondence do not express any doubt of the authorship.

a trifle the shortest, and it would have given Napoleon the greatest start over Kutusov, who presumably would pursue; but it led through broken country, with no good roads and no towns, very thinly inhabited. It would not have been an utter desert, like the direct road to Smolensk, but it is doubtful whether the advantages gained would have compensated for the further difficulties involved in reorganising the whole machinery of communication in order to direct it along another route. Whether this plan was ever contemplated by Napoleon does not appear; it is very different from that sketched out in the memorandum above cited, which, whether the Emperor's own or not, was at some time considered and abandoned.

The established line of communication was not exactly that of the advance. When Napoleon reached Smolensk, after the *détour* of Drissa and Vitepsk involved in his following the retreating enemy, he naturally adopted the line of the great high road through Minsk; and immense depôts had been formed there, as well as at Vilna and Smolensk. The whole route also was in some sense occupied by troops, though the growing numbers and enterprise of the Cossacks and new Russian levies rendered this occupation less and less effective as time went on. The French however, retreating by this road, must have depended entirely on the supplies they could carry away from Moscow, and on what could be sent to meet them. They had themselves destroyed on their advance everything which the inhabitants had failed to carry away. For forty or fifty miles north and south of the high road, unless all the accounts exaggerate grossly, the country was a desert, the villages and towns burnt, the crops consumed, all property destroyed. The inhabitants had left little behind

when they fled, obeying the word of command or their own fears; and the French had by this very fact been compelled to range further from the road in the daily quest of food. Little or nothing could be gained, as has been said, by retreating on Vitepsk—that is to say, parallel to the Smolensk road, but north of it. On the south, however, the case was different: the country was richer and more practicable; there lay two important towns, Tula with its arsenal, and Kaluga with great magazines. If the French could reach Kaluga, all anxiety about subsistence would be at an end; they could march thence to Smolensk, incidentally destroying the works at Tula. The way was barred by the main Russian army, which the French were still confident of beating in a fair trial of strength. In the last week of September this might perhaps have been achieved, but since then the balance had shifted materially in favour of the Russians. It was a choice of evils, in reality. Most of Napoleon's generals preferred retreating by the direct route, the conditions of doing which were known, bad as they were. Napoleon, perhaps over-estimating his own relative strength, chose the more venturesome course, the more so as it did not involve the same open confession of failure.

Clausewitz argues that Napoleon must have intended to return by the direct route; no one in his senses would aim at retreating except on a line already prepared, *i.e.*, occupied by detachments and supplied with magazines; the army marching *viâ* Kaluga would have had no time to collect supplies, and would have starved in a week. The apparent move on Kaluga was in substance meant, he thinks, to intimidate Kutusov, and push him further from the Smolensk road, while satisfying Napoleon's wish to

seem to be still acting on the offensive. Clausewitz rather ignores the facts, viz., that sufficient food for the horses could not be carried with them, that the soldiers had in fact plundered for a large part of their food in the advance, and would more or less have to do the same in the retreat, that the direct road was eaten bare of food for man and beast, that there were very few and small magazines east of Smolensk. The army moving through the Kaluga country, if they could have done so, might very probably not have obtained adequate supplies; but at the worst they would have obtained something from the country, besides the stores at Kaluga itself. If Napoleon had merely wished to get Kutusov a little further out of the way, he would not have employed his whole army for the purpose.

(From the beginning of the French retreat it becomes impossible to give numbers with any confidence in their accuracy. The various accounts differ enormously, and adequate guidance in discriminating among them is seldom available. One or two general remarks may be made: 1. The French estimates of the loss inflicted by them on their enemies are mere guesswork, since they never remained in possession of the field; and in many cases they are obviously at variance with all the probabilities. 2. The Russian accounts seem to exaggerate enormously the losses of the French, especially in regard to the number of prisoners taken. Most part of this is due to their not distinguishing between the troops still properly organised, and the mob of stragglers and non-combatants. A certain number of the latter had arms, and they thronged the roads in a way which at a distance might be mistaken for regular columns. The Russians were of course aware that there was a large amount of disorganisation in the French host, but they might easily be mistaken in detail. Apart from this, the Russians doubtless, like the French, tended to exaggerate in their own favour. 3. Buturlin, the Russian official historian,

during the latter period of the campaign makes *all* numbers very much higher than other writers. In some instances he is certainly wrong; in others there is no means of judging which of the discrepant authorities is right. It is not partiality, for he gives high figures both ways, whether they tell to the credit of his own side or of the other. 4. On a few occasions Chambray is able to give figures carefully based on actual returns. These, I think, may be regarded as authentic. Apart from these last, I have consequently given the numbers very generally, and do not lay stress on them.)

CHAPTER IX.

IN REAR OF THE GRAND ARMY.

During all this time matters were going from bad to worse in Napoleon's rear. The French writers indeed boast of regular postal communications between Paris and Moscow. The Emperor issued a variety of decrees on details of administration for his Empire dated from Moscow. But in reality even the direct line was with difficulty kept open. Baraguay d'Hilliers, whom Napoleon had appointed governor of the province of Smolensk and charged with the supervision of the whole route as far as Mozhaisk, wrote in the most pressing terms to Berthier, as early as the twentieth of September, as to his urgent need of many more men, if he was to do anything at all.[1] The Russian peasantry were everywhere in arms; the country was infested also with French marauders; nowhere except actually at Smolensk were there soldiers enough to keep the enemy in check or to obtain any supplies, which could only be procured by force. Whether these remonstrances ever reached Napoleon cannot be certainly known. Berthier perhaps softened things for the imperial ear. In his despatches he did occasionally modify the harsh language of Napoleon's instructions, and he may have thought it useless to irritate his master by reports of troubles which might be

[1] See his letters in Chambray, ii. 280, *sq.*

exaggerated, and which at any rate could not be remedied in the manner suggested. Further back the state of things was even worse. A letter[1] from Napoleon's intendant at Vitepsk to his colleague at Vilna, intercepted by the Russians, gives a lively picture of his position. "Our brave subjects," he says, "won't fight, don't like to part with their goods, and don't dream of giving their money," so that he can get nothing. "D'un autre côté," he adds, "la commission administrative que l'Empereur avait mis sous ma présidence, et qui était richement composée de princes et de comtes, a disparu comme l'ombre vaine qui passe et ne revient plus." Napoleon's tacit assumption that his commands would be law everywhere within the regions which his armies had traversed, had never been effectually realised except where the armies were actually present: and the greater the territory nominally under his control, the more shadowy that control became.

The 9th corps under Marshal Victor, 32,500 strong, had crossed the Niemen on the third of September, and had been ordered up to Smolensk. Victor was given "a general command over all Lithuania and the provinces of Smolensk and Vitepsk"; and Dombrowski's force of nearly 10,000 men in and near Mohilew was formally attached to the 9th corps, thus raising its total to 40,000. This seems a large addition to Napoleon's resources, though in fact it did not compensate for the losses of Borodino alone. At any rate it formed a central reserve, capable of being used to support the main army, or either wing, according to circumstances. Napoleon's much-lauded despatch[2] of the sixth of October, instructing Victor how to act in that

[1] F. O. Russia, 202, under date the twenty-eighth of October.

[2] Nap. Corr. 19,258.

capacity, would be admirable but for one fatal flaw, that it charged him with duties far beyond his strength. Whether Napoleon's information was really defective, whether he deceived himself at Moscow, as earlier in the campaign, by refusing to believe the enemy to be as strong as reports made him out to be and as he really was, or whether he misrepresented things to his lieutenant in order to avoid discouraging him, can only be conjectured. Certain it is that he greatly under-estimated the pressure on his wings—he stated, for instance, that Chichagov was only bringing 20,000 men from Moldavia instead of nearly 40,000—and gave Victor a task which he could hardly have fulfilled if he had commanded 100,000 men instead of two-fifths of that number. Without the relief afforded by Victor's corps not a man of the Grand Army would have escaped out of Russia; but, as will be seen, it was utterly inadequate to stop the hostile floods which were pouring from north and south, and threatening to meet across Napoleon's rear.

Behind Victor there was the so-called 11th corps under Marshal Augereau, nominally over 50,000 strong; but this comprised battalions of refractory conscripts and other troops of little value, and did not even profess to include any cavalry, the most important arm to reinforce. Two divisions from it entered Russia in the course of November, and shared in the final ruin. Beyond this Germany could not be denuded without danger—greater danger than Napoleon knew, for Prussia would have risen at any moment if the government had dared to give the signal. According to Chambray's careful estimate, 65,000 more men, including those levied in Lithuania, were brought up in detachments to join Napoleon's armies in the course of the campaign. A considerable proportion of these

had come in before the retreat began, and have to be added to the tale of those expended. From France no more were to be had for a long time, nor yet from the other countries under his control. The present campaign at any rate must be concluded with the troops already included in the Grand Army, unless he could succeed in extracting reinforcements from his allies. Naturally he put all possible pressure on them, but without much success. As early as the twentieth of September an officer passed through Königsberg[1] bearing the Grand Duke of Baden's refusal to increase his contingent beyond the stipulated number. From Moscow Napoleon, on the sixteenth of October, instructed Maret[2] to urge the King of Prussia to replace two cavalry regiments, which had suffered very heavily, by two new ones fresh and well-mounted, a step by which he said that Prussia would gain greatly! Prussia was also to be asked for 7,000 more men, because it was so much to her advantage to bring the war promptly to an end; and the same pressure was to be put on Austria, Bavaria, Wurtemberg, *et partout*. And this is followed by a truly Napoleonic touch: "Non seulement je désire qu'on envoie des renforts, mais je désire aussi qu'on exagère ces envois, et que les souverains fassent mettre dans leurs gazettes le grand nombre de troupes qui part, en en doublant le nombre." It does not appear that any of Napoleon's allies were quite equal to the occasion. It would have been easy to improve on the latter part of his demand, and announce any amount of reinforcements without sending a man. Austria had indeed partly refilled Schwarzenberg's ranks, depleted by malarious fevers, which was perhaps within

[1] V. A. Floret an Metternich, 1812.

[2] Nap. Corr. 19,278.

the terms of her treaty obligation, but neither Austria nor Prussia would go one step further. The comic element, which is seldom absent from the gravest affairs, was not altogether wanting at this juncture. The despatch fell into the hands of the Russians, who, not of course knowing that another copy had reached Maret safely, sent it to Count Stackelberg for the edification of the Austrian government, with a letter[1] gravely regretting that a great man should descend to such low practices.

The fidelity bred of fear, which kept all central Europe to Napoleon's side, had not yet begun to give way, so far as outward appearances went. Austria and Prussia were in perfect accord with each other; both were looking forward to the time that should enable them to recover the independence which Prussia had entirely lost, and Austria had gravely compromised. Each was determined not to move without the other, but Austria could better afford to wait, for she had made a satisfactory bargain in her treaty with France, whereas Prussia was trodden to the dust. Hence Metternich was able to play the game in his own way, and he played it with admirable judgment from the Austrian point of view. It is plain that the conviction which both governments gradually attained, that the Tzar, contrary to all expectations, would not give way after a defeat or two, as he had done after Friedland, was the first thing which gave them courage to contemplate action in the near future. But Metternich was very slow—much slower than Hardenberg—to see any prospect of Russia being able to escape from overwhelming defeat. Napoleon's precautions, that no news should be sent back from the army except what he chose to publish in his bulletins, had been successful so far

[1] V. A. Russland, 1812.

as the European public was concerned. Metternich's private letters to Stackelberg during this period contain incessant expressions of regret at the mismanagement at the Russian head-quarters, and of despair at any check being put on Napoleon's progress. He had no notion what it was costing Napoleon to reach Moscow. He was possibly influenced by his preconceived mistrust of Rumantzov, and he was also without sources of secret information which Hardenberg possessed. Napoleon no doubt regarded Prussia as entirely at his disposal, for he allowed Krusemark, the Prussian diplomatist, to go to Vilna at the end of July, whence he was able to send very valuable communications home. The Austrian Floret was kept at Königsberg, where as he complained[1] news reached them from Berlin or Paris, until the middle of October; so that practically it was from Berlin that Metternich received the intelligence which was not common to all the world.

At the beginning of September Hardenberg received a report, written by some one at the Russian head-quarters[2] just before the battle at Smolensk, which he immediately communicated to Metternich. It anticipated with accuracy the results of the first great battle, though it took place not, as the writer expected, near Smolensk, but at Borodino. Napoleon would win it, but only after immense bloodshed, and would not rout the Russians. And it would alter the balance greatly; for behind the field army were endless reserves, and the national spirit was thoroughly roused and ready for any sacrifices. Hardenberg appears from the

[1] Floret to Metternich, No. 14, V. A. Frank. Corr. 1812.

[2] An extract from it is given in Oncken, i. 5. He does not hazard a guess at the writer's name, but there were not a few German officers on the Russian staff.

letter[1] which he wrote to Metternich with this report not to have felt very confident that Russia would be willing and able to hold out against defeat, but still he saw a chance that Napoleon might fail. In any case he foresaw new demands on his part which Prussia could not meet, being already almost bled to death, and he begged Metternich to consider at what point resistance to them should begin. The Austrian could not or would not reply speedily; his answer is only dated the fourth of October, after Napoleon's occupation of Moscow was known. In it he expresses a total disbelief in the Russian government achieving any success whatever, insists on the absolute necessity for remaining quiet for the present, and discloses his hope that in the coming winter Austria will be able to bring about negotiations for a general peace, by applying first to England. He did not see the significance of the burning of Moscow; indeed, he expresses a month later the belief that Russia was conquered. He admits that Austria, more favourably situated than Prussia, can better afford to wait, and that Hardenberg's impatience to see some escape from an intolerable position is natural. But for the present he sees no resource except for Prussia to plead, as against any further demands from Napoleon, her total inability to comply, which Hardenberg had painted vividly. Thus though nothing for the time betrayed any inclination on the part of the two German powers to turn against Napoleon, the way was being prepared in secret, though neither had yet any idea how soon and how decisively the balance would shift.

Though Russia could for the time look for no active support from foreign powers, except the arms and money

[1] Printed in Oncken, i. 375, together with Metternich's reply.

sent from England, the assistance which the main army needed had been secured before the invasion began, though a variety of circumstances had delayed its being brought to bear on the campaign. Peace with Turkey and with Sweden had rendered available the Russian armies on the Danube and in Finland. Their co-operation was necessary to make the Russian wings—Wittgenstein in the north, Tormazov in the south—superior to the forces which Napoleon had detached to oppose them. Hitherto the French wings had been somewhat the stronger; now the balance would be reversed, and whatever Kutusov might do or not do with the central force, the jaws of the great trap were slowly closing between the Grand Army and the frontier.

Napoleon's hope that the Turks would after all refuse to ratify the Treaty of Bucharest had proved baseless, in spite of all the efforts of Andreossy, his astute representative at Constantinople. Thus nothing interfered with the march of Admiral Chichagov's army from the Danube towards Volhynia, which began very early in August. Considering the distance he made good progress, it being well over 500 miles from Bucharest to the position of the 3rd army of the west, which he was to join. It is open to question whether this direction was the most advantageous one; it was the natural one in the first instance, when the campaign had only just begun, and the Russians had not yet found out that they would be compelled to retreat so far. The order once given was acted on by Chichagov, and though there was much hesitation at head-quarters, and several changes of plan were ordered, none reached him till he had effected his junction with Tormazov. One order was actually sent about the time that Kutusov assumed the chief command, to the effect

that the army of Moldavia should march on Moscow, so as to help in defending the capital. This was somehow delayed *en route*, fortunately for the Russian cause, and did not come to hand till after Chichagov knew that Moscow had fallen. The distance is so great that under the most favourable conditions he could not have reached Kutusov's camp at Tarutino before the battle of Maloyaroslavetz, and anyhow he would have been useless there. It was not lack of men, but lack of will, that caused Kutusov's inaction; 35,000 men more would have been simply wasted. It would have been feasible for Chichagov to come *viâ* Kiev up the line of the Dnieper, and Napoleon's long stay at Moscow would have left time for him to arrive at Smolensk first. West of the Dnieper lies the vast region of the Pinsk marshes, so that taking a course west of them was longer than to have gone north from Kiev; but it brought him across Napoleon's path further westwards, which meant that more time was available. Stress need not be laid upon the question whether it was the best direction for combination with the armies from the neighbourhood of the Baltic. The distances were too great for anything but the loosest possible co-operation. The elaborate scheme of operations sent in the Tzar's name for all the generals on the wings remained, as it deserved, a dead letter. The end to be attained was obvious; the means of effecting it must depend on circumstances impossible to calculate beforehand. There was one theoretical drawback to Chichagov's march into Volhynia: the whole route lay so near the Austrian frontier that a flank attack was anywhere possible. This however was only apparent; the relations between Austria and Russia were such that nothing was more unlikely than an Austrian move out of

Transylvania or Galicia. Indeed, Chichagov reported[1] that the Austrians had sent to inquire what he was about, and were quite satisfied when he explained that he was taking the shortest line of march to his destination, though they could hardly have helped seeing that he was moving straight towards Schwarzenberg.

It was very fortunate for Russia that Chichagov was in fact left at the head of an independent army. Though not a brilliant general, and frequently too slow, he was a sound one; he understood the task assigned to him, was not afraid of responsibility, and was not the man to throw away advantages. He had at least one quality of great value in his position: he knew his own mind, and was not at all shy of expressing it to his master. His letters to the Tzar, published in vol. vi. of the Russian State Papers, show sound common-sense, ample forethought, and readiness to accept responsibility. His first remark, on receiving instructions to leave Moldavia with the bulk of his forces and march to join the 3rd army in Volhynia, was that he hoped the Tzar would make it clear which was to command, he or Tormazov, or else time would be wasted. He repeated the question more than once, but never got a definite answer. This was possibly the fault of Kutusov, to whom Alexander had given supreme command over all the Russian armies, and who sent orders and counter-orders which only did no mischief because they arrived too late for execution. On the third of August we find him asking the Tzar to let him know what he is to say to the Poles, to counteract the hopes of seeing their nationality restored which Napoleon had

[1] Chichagov to the Tzar, the second of August, Russian State Papers, vol. vi.

inspired. On receiving the Tzar's assurance that the war was to be fought out to the last, he remarks that Napoleon, *qui a triomphé successivement de toutes les guerres du cabinet et des conseils, a succombé infailliblement à toutes celles qui ont été nationales.* When at the end of September Chernishev brought the elaborate instructions of the Tzar, the Admiral sent off a very plain-spoken reply, criticising the orders as at once too vague and too precise, not stating definitely who is to have the chief responsibility, yet prescribing an impossible exactness of co-operation with the other armies, and still worse as requiring everything to be submitted for the Tzar's approval, which at that distance was equivalent to doing nothing. He winds up with saying that he shall act as if the orders really were definite, and *celui qui s'y opposera en répondra.* A remarkable letter[1] this to address to an autocrat! It is creditable to both Alexander and Chichagov that it should have been written, and it was well for Russia that he acted in conformity with it.

The difficulty as to getting Tormazov to obey, without the Tzar's having distinctly placed him under the Admiral's orders, was practically solved just after it had arisen, by Tormazov being summoned to take a command under Kutusov. Then Chichagov found himself at the head of about 64,000 men, while Schwarzenberg had some 20,000 less. It was, as it happened, the very day on which Napoleon entered Moscow, that Chichagov's advanced guard reached the river Styr, behind which Tormazov had been standing on the defensive ever since his defeat at Gorodeczna in August. Schwarzenberg's army had

[1] Chichagov to Alexander, the twenty-second of September, Russian State Papers, vi. 30.

been watching them all the time, without making even an attempt at resuming the offensive. Schwarzenberg himself was a partisan of the French alliance, and was proud both of having had the 7th corps put under him and of his military success;[1] but he was doubtless under orders from Vienna not to do too much, and the marshy region in which the whole of his share of the campaign was conducted caused much sickness among his troops. Just before the army of the Danube turned the scale decisively against him, he wrote[2] to Berthier, explaining elaborately the topographical and other difficulties which made it impossible to cross the Styr in face even of an inferior enemy. When, a few days later, he ascertained by reconnaissance that Chichagov also was in front of him, he saw that he had no alternative but to retreat.

Schwarzenberg began retiring westwards, but presently turned north and moved down the Bug to Brest-Litovsk, one of his divisions (Siegenthal) for no very intelligible reason being sent *viâ* Kobrin to Pruzhani. On the ninth of October Chichagov arrived before Brest-Litovsk, and hoping that Schwarzenberg would fight there, sent to call in the force which he had detached to follow Siegenthal. Schwarzenberg however declined a battle against very superior numbers, and on the night of the tenth disappeared in the direction of Warsaw, establishing himself at Wengrow; Siegenthal at the same time retreated to Bialystok. Since all Schwarzenberg's supplies, and expected reinforcements to Reynier's corps, must come through Warsaw, he had practically no choice. Though

[1] Schwarzenberg to Metternich, the fifteenth of August, V. A. K. A. F., 223.

[2] V. A. Schreiben des F. Schwarzenberg, the fifteenth of September.

he left the way to the vitally important depôt of Minsk open to Chichagov, he saved himself from being reduced to great straits, and he had the chance, though only the chance, of taking Chichagov in rear if he moved on Minsk.

Chichagov, having obtained possession of Brest-Litovsk, gave the main part of his army a rest there, despatching Sacken with two divisions to Pruzhani, and overrunning the duchy of Warsaw with his Cossacks and other light cavalry. Chichagov is blamed for his inaction: he ought, it is said, to have given Schwarzenberg no respite, having a superior force which could drive him to indefinite retreat. There is no evidence to show what amount of need there was for resting his army, which had been on the march for over two months; it is at least possible that it was the best economy in the long run. But anyhow Chichagov would have been sacrificing the substance to the shadow if he had followed Schwarzenberg to Warsaw, instead of placing himself on Napoleon's line of communications. Thus when the French quitted Moscow, Napoleon's right wing had been driven out of Russian territory, and Chichagov was at Brest-Litovsk with a sufficiently large army to hold Schwarzenberg in check with part, while he moved on Minsk with the remainder.

From the northern side the immediate military pressure was not so dangerous, but politically things were even worse. Turkey was at any rate neutral; Sweden had really joined the coalition against Napoleon, though still keeping up appearances. The Crown Prince had a difficult game to play: he dared not, as he told the English minister,[1] who complained that there was still a French

[1] Thornton to Castlereagh, the thirteenth of October, R. O. Sweden, 219.

chargé d'affaires at Stockholm, break with France unless he could show Sweden definite advantages to be gained by war. His heart was set on acquiring Norway; but England, though not disapproving in the abstract, absolutely refused to assist the project at that time. Castlereagh saw that a Swedish attack on Norway would not only bring Denmark actively to Napoleon's side, but would employ all the resources of Sweden, which could be better spent in making or assisting a diversion in Napoleon's rear. This Bernadotte could not or would not venture without his price, and thus practically there was a deadlock. Rumours however of an Anglo-Swedish or Russo-Swedish descent on the north coast of Germany were rife, and caused Napoleon some anxiety. Just before leaving Vitepsk he bade Maret[1] get the Prussian government to write to Stockholm to the effect that the smallest enterprise *provoquerait la marche de* 30,000 *Prussiens.* The King of Prussia obeyed, sending a message in those very words, which Thornton rightly interpreted[2] as dictated by Napoleon. It may be doubted whether he would have carried out the threat he had been forced to make, but he was not put to the test.

Thinking that Russia might be more forward to help him to Norway, Bernadotte accepted with pleasure the suggestion that he should meet the Tzar at Abo, in Finland. Accordingly they met on the twenty-eighth of August, Lord Cathcart accompanying the Tzar, and the Treaty of Abo was the result. By it Russia was to assist Sweden with 30,000 men and a loan in her attempt to

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,083.

[2] Thornton to Castlereagh, the eighteenth of September, R. O. Sweden, 219.

seize Norway, while Sweden agreed, when the time should come, to back the Tzar's wish to extend his frontier to the Vistula. Cathcart reported[1] that the Tzar was quite satisfied of Bernadotte's loyalty, and had therefore agreed to this arrangement, seeing the Swedish point of view, though it was obviously not the best use of the troops in the interests of Russia. Later on the project of any attack on Denmark was abandoned for that year, in view of the lateness of the season and Sweden's lack of money, and 14,000 Russian troops were brought across from Finland, most of whom landed at Revel on September the tenth.

Since the severe fighting near Polotsk in August, there had been a virtual cessation of hostilities in the neighbourhood of the Dwina. The Russians had been gradually reinforcing Wittgenstein, who had been left, as the ultimate result of the August operations, in a position of slight inferiority to his immediate opponents. He had fortified his camp at Sivokhino, and from that position was able to prevent the enemy from foraging on the right bank of the Dwina. St. Cyr on his side fortified Polotsk, and Oudinot had ample time to recover from his wound. The troops, fairly well supplied and not overworked, remained in good case, though the Bavarians of the 6th corps, less skilful than the French in making themselves comfortable, suffered greatly from sickness. Napoleon was contented that they should merely hold their ground: what he required was that his northern flank should be protected while the main work of the campaign was being done by himself. Wittgenstein was for the present obliged to stand on the defensive, and even if he had been ready to resume active operations, the time for so doing was not yet come. A

[1] Cathcart to Castlereagh, the thirtieth of August, R. O. Russia, 201.

vigorous attack on Napoleon's flanks would obviously be more effective the further he had plunged into the heart of Russia.

Macdonald, who was charged with the siege of Riga, had also been inactive. He himself had remained by Napoleon's orders at Dünaburg, though the Prussians forming the larger part of his corps were in front of Riga. The siege in fact was never formed at all; there were not even French troops on the northern side of the Dwina. The garrison under General Essen retained possession of many square miles of country round the city, and there was of course no pretence of closing it in on the sea side. Heavy guns and other siege materials had been slowly accumulated at Ruhenthal, and great quantities of other stores at Mitau; but no steps had been taken to draw closer round Riga. Critics blame Napoleon for his management of Macdonald's corps: unless he intended actively to attack Riga, so large a force was not wanted. It is obvious that at the outset, when Dünaburg was supposed to be fortified, Macdonald's 32,000 men were none too many for clearing away whatever opposition Russian troops might offer, and besieging two fortresses. But when Dünaburg proved to be really undefended, and the Russian right wing, hardly pressed by Oudinot and St. Cyr, left Courland to take care of itself, more use might have been made of Macdonald's corps. The marshal says in his memoirs that when at length the siege train had been brought within reach—it required, he says, 40,000 horses in relays—he submitted various plans for attacking Riga, but received no instructions whatever. It is indeed singular how little attention Napoleon paid to his left wing after he had once left the Dwina behind, if his Correspondence is any evidence. There are literally no orders

to Macdonald after his occupation of Dünaburg. On the twenty-sixth of August Victor[1] is told that Macdonald *peut se porter sur Riga pour invester la place.* On the tenth of September Macdonald is told[2] that he has *carte blanche* to besiege Riga, or do anything else he thinks best. Simultaneously, however, St. Cyr is told that it is believed Wittgenstein is retreating so as to get between St. Petersburg and Moscow, and that by combining with Macdonald he ought to be able to crush him. Since however the bulk of Macdonald's troops were 150 miles from St. Cyr, any combination would have been extremely tardy and ineffective. The same despatch[3] contains orders to St. Cyr to send to Kowno for food supplies, a distance of 250 miles, or several weeks' journey for waggons there and back. One is almost driven to the conclusion that Napoleon had lost all count of the distances except in relation to his own immediate army.

The elaborate scheme formulated at St. Petersburg in September for the co-operation of the two wings was even less capable of execution on the northern side than on the southern. Nowhere had sufficient forces been assembled for working it out effectually, even if the accurate combination prescribed between the various Russian armies had been feasible. With the aid of the field telegraph, and with 30,000 more men, it might have been possible, with good fortune, to carry it out. As things were, the attempt to accomplish the first items of the programme led to waste of both men and time. It was ordered that the garrison of Riga, 20,000 strong, should push out on the left bank of

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,146.
[2] Nap. Corr. 19,186.
[3] Nap. Corr. 19,193.

the Dwina when the troops from Finland under Steingell were approaching, so as to draw Macdonald's attention away from Wittgenstein. The latter was simultaneously to attack Polotsk from above, so as to turn St. Cyr's right, cut him from the Grand Army, and drive him back towards Vilna. Then Steingell was to follow St. Cyr to Vilna, while Wittgenstein turned towards the Berezina to join hands with Chichagov. Unfortunately the garrison of Riga was little above half the requisite number, and General Essen had to wait for Steingell's arrival before he could do anything; nor had Wittgenstein's reinforcements reached him at the time specified.

Steingell, owing to various accidents, landed at Revel with only 10,000 men instead of 14,000, and with these marched at once to Riga. On his arrival the contemplated attack was made upon the Prussians, who were stationed two days' march or more from the city. The French writers assume that the object of the Russians was to destroy the siege train and magazines; but it is clear from Buturlin's account that this was only a subsidiary object, and that they did not know where exactly the siege train was. York, who had just succeeded to the command of the Prussians, took his measures promptly and with judgment. The Russians had divided their forces instead of keeping them concentrated, and York was therefore able, though slightly inferior in numbers, to check Steingell's advance. After a series of small combats, in which neither side displayed much vigour, the Russians retreated on Riga. Only one thing had been achieved, namely that Macdonald had been drawn to his left, farther away from Polotsk, but valuable time had been lost. Steingell, if he had marched straight from Revel to join Wittgenstein, might have

reached him by the beginning of October, but of course he was acting upon the imperial scheme.

After the ineffectual venture from Riga, Steingell apparently judged for himself, and set out to join Wittgenstein. That general by the middle of October had received reinforcements which brought his army up to 40,000 men, to which nearly 10,000 more would be added on Steingell's arrival. His instructions from the Tzar were to cross the Dwina above Polotsk and attack St. Cyr by both banks, thus tending to cut his communications with Napoleon. Though St. Cyr in spite of reinforcements had only 27,000 men, Wittgenstein alone had hardly troops enough to carry out this scheme successfully, especially as Polotsk was fortified. Moreover he would have been exposed to the risk of being caught in rear by Victor, though this he may not have known. At any rate he decided to attack Polotsk from the other side, and concerted with Steingell a plan[1] which might have been reasonable enough but for one serious flaw. Steingell, reinforced by some of Wittgenstein's cavalry, was to cross the Dwina at Druia and march up the left bank, Wittgenstein directly attacking Polotsk, which is on the right bank. The obvious calculation was that if St. Cyr stood to fight Wittgenstein he would have all retreat across the Dwina cut off by Steingell, and that therefore he would probably abandon Polotsk. The equally obvious flaw was that St. Cyr might destroy Steingell, who had not half his force, while Wittgenstein, separated from him by the Dwina, could render no assistance. If Wittgenstein had possessed a pontoon train, he could have readily bridged

[1] Buturlin, ii. 276, implies that this was Steingell's plan, the two generals being independent. If so, Wittgenstein made the best of a bad business by helping him.

the Dwina a little way below Polotsk, and so obviated this risk. As it was he saw the danger, but instead of modifying his plan, tried to meet the difficulty by collecting materials for a wooden bridge, a task which would take far too long.

St. Cyr, who seems to have been fully informed as to the enemy's strength and movements, brought his baggage and train across to the southern bank of the Dwina, in anticipation of being compelled to retreat, but resolved to hold his ground as long as possible. On the sixteenth of October Wittgenstein moved straight on Polotsk, and assaulted the place on the eighteenth. This was perhaps done in order to prevent St. Cyr from attacking Steingell, who was still at some distance. Even so it was premature and cost him many men, the works enabling the French to resist successfully. The next day St. Cyr had Steingell also on his hands, and though he detached troops who kept Steingell at bay for the time, he made up his mind to retreat at nightfall. Wittgenstein, detecting his purpose, attacked again, and a greater part of the night was spent in a desperate conflict in the streets, the French gradually retiring across the two bridges of boats, which they ultimately managed to set on fire. Being thus safe for the moment, St. Cyr on the twentieth sent Wrede, who now commanded his own original corps of Bavarians, to drive back Steingell. This he succeeded in doing, as the river prevented Steingell from receiving any assistance from Wittgenstein, the bridge which ought to have united them being hardly begun. On the twenty-first St. Cyr retreated; the relics of the 6th corps under Wrede moved to Glubokoie, so as to cover Vilna, the remainder on Tchasniki, with one division at Bechenkowiczi, so as to effect a junction with Victor. The whole affair had cost him 6,000 men, including

prisoners; the Russian losses were probably about equal.[1] Wittgenstein's want of pontoons again impeded him; it was not till the twenty-third that he could get the bridge at Polotsk restored, so as to begin his pursuit.

Victor's instructions, which could only just have come to hand, were to support either wing in case of necessity, though the whole tone of the despatch of the sixth of October implies that Napoleon then thought that contingency remote. On hearing that Wittgenstein was advancing on Polotsk, he had seen that he must assist St. Cyr, and moved towards him. Thus before Napoleon's retreat from Moscow began, his one reserve had been committed to supporting the northern wing, and was indeed none too strong for the purpose. No reserves were available to check the march of Chichagov on Minsk whenever he should be ready to move, none to sustain and relieve the centre. When Napoleon turned back from Maloyaroslavetz he was about 250 miles from Smolensk and 400 from the Berezina, with Kutusov's army so placed that it could reach Smolensk before him. Chichagov at Brest-Litovsk was 200 miles from Minsk and 250 from the Berezina, with no enemy to stop him. Wittgenstein was advancing from Polotsk with a fairly equal enemy facing him, and distant about eighty miles from Borisov, which as the place where the great road crosses the Berezina was the central point to which all were necessarily converging.

[1] Chambray's assertion that the Russian losses were fully double those of the French is inconsistent with the strength which Wittgenstein certainly had when he came to face Victor a few days later.

CHAPTER X.

MALOYAROSLAVETZ.

Napoleon's Correspondence during his stay at Moscow is worth studying. At first sight it appears to exhibit marvellous care and forethought. He knew, cries the admiring historian, the position of every soldier in his service back to the Rhine. His despatches contain orders for the movement of small detachments all over North Germany. He is unwearied in directing the supply not only of reinforcements, but of horses, food, ammunition. He has ordered a quantity of hand-mills from Paris; he bids Maret keep one or two as patterns and have some more made at Vilna. He has thought of the kind of carts most useful for service with certain troops. He gives the fullest instructions to the officers upon whom it devolved to maintain the communications of the army. No convoy is to start from Smolensk without an escort of at least 1,500 men, who are always to bivouac in square round it. Markets are to be established at every point along the main road, "pour le service des vivres de la route en farines et viandes."[1] He bids Berthier have the country explored for two or three leagues on each side of it, to find parallel roads on which there are villages and other resources, so that troops coming to the front may

[1] This order is not in Nap. Corr., but is given by Fain, ii. 145, among a number of others which are there.

march mainly by these, coming upon the high road only at specified points. In this way the soldiers will pass through country of which the resources are not exhausted, and the high road will be left clear for heavy traffic. *Primâ facie* all this is admirable; it is the work of a general who fully realises the complication of the machine he is directing, and takes thought for everything. But in reality the whole is vitiated by the fatal assumption that he has only to order and everything will be done in conformity. For instance, the order to Berthier just quoted[1] was a mockery: there was not the least chance of finding by-roads in Russia that could be worked in the way specified; it would have been hard enough to find them in France or Germany. Moreover, the country was a desert for twenty leagues, not merely two or three, on each side of the road. We have seen already how utterly unable his officers were to keep the line of communication clear with the forces at their disposal. Similarly he writes[2] as if his request to the Emperor of Austria to reinforce Schwarzenberg with 10,000 men, and to cause the force posted at Lemberg to make a demonstration across the frontier, was certain to be acted on. Napoleon had achieved such wonders that he had lost all clear perception of the limits set to the omnipotence of his will, whether by the nature of things, or by the unwillingness of other men to ignore every consideration except his good pleasure.

Probably from the same source proceeded his inability to realise that he was in difficulties. The utmost that he can contemplate is having to continue the war next year, for which he makes ample provision on paper. He gives orders

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,269.
[2] Nap. Corr. 19,258.

for next year's conscription in France ; he thinks that 6,000 men can be spared from the navy, be gradually collected and formed into battalions. He wants some regiments of Germans (apparently prisoners of war who had been made to enlist) drilled and sent to Poland by February. He instructs Eugene how another corps of nearly 20,000 men may be got together in Italy and sent across the Brenner in December. Such measures were wise enough in themselves, and doubtless came in usefully after the destruction of the Grand Army; but their whole tone implies that at Moscow he never dreamed of the destruction impending.

The same unreasonable optimism affects even his military judgment. He will not believe that Kutusov, posted to the south of Moscow, will dare to threaten Mozhaisk: shut us up in Moscow !—a victorious army would not venture to attempt it, much less a beaten one. Kutusov's only purpose is to cover the march of Chichagov, coming to reinforce him.[1] He will not hear of his march away from Moscow being a retreat ; the army is victorious and can choose which way it pleases.[2] Even after the retreat has begun, after the failure at Maloyaroslavetz, he tells Junot and Victor that the Russian army only contains 15,000 old soldiers, and that the Cossack cavalry, "peu dangereuse en realité, fatigue beaucoup."[3] He had not long to wait before having proof that the Cossacks were more than dangerous.

[1] Letter of the twenty-seventh of September, given in Fain, ii. 115, not in Nap. Corr. See also the instructions to Victor on the sixth of October, Nap. Corr. 19,258.

[2] This was the opinion he deliberately expressed at St. Helena—Montholon, ii. 104. It is wonderful that after the event he was not wiser.

[3] Nap. Corr. 19,307.

Meanwhile this state of mind was ruinous; it made him play into the hands of the enemy, both by delaying his departure, and also by making the measures taken by way of preparing for the retreat utterly inadequate to the emergency.

He had indeed been making some slight preparations for quitting Moscow from the date of Lauriston's mission to Kutusov. He ordered lists to be made of the wounded, of whom there were many thousands at Mozhaisk and Borodino, and further in rear, distinguishing those who were nearly convalescent and might be expected to march, those who would die if moved, and those who could be moved in vehicles. He was genuinely anxious to save as much food for powder as possible; how much humanity there was in the desire may be judged from his requiring the return of the exact number in the hospitals, "so that he might know what it would cost if military operations led to the abandonment of them all."[1] On the fifth of October he gave orders[2] for the removal of the wounded to begin, in terms which illustrate admirably his habit of expecting his officers to make bricks without straw. Junot is responsible for conveying them to Viasma, Baraguay d'Hilliers thence to Smolensk; but they must collect vehicles from the country ten leagues round, and not a word is said about horses. Of course there was not a vehicle within twenty leagues of the high road; the French on their eastward march had seized any which the inhabitants had happened to leave behind; and Napoleon himself had been writing incessantly for more horses, being well aware that he was grievously short of the proper number. Of course the orders could

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,250.
[2] Nap. Corr. 19,251.

not be executed ; it was, as has been seen, beyond Baraguay d'Hilliers' power even to keep the road free of Cossacks. And for the wounded who were conveyed away it was almost a sentence of death, for in the scarcity of everything they fared the worst. Happy were those whose end was most accelerated by lack of adequate food and shelter, and who thereby escaped being left helpless by the wayside to fall into the hands of the infuriated peasants.

Orders were given on the thirteenth for concentrating in Moscow the troops which had been stationed in the vicinity, but this seems to have been done merely on the chance of marching against Kutusov. The corps commanders were also told,[1] as if in mockery, to provide themselves with food for three months; brandy alone would be supplied from the central magazine. Murat had, according to Chambray, sent an officer to explain to Napoleon the dangers of his position, short of food, with his left flank unprotected, with an immensely superior enemy in front. And Napoleon was so little alive to the situation that he blamed Murat for not having taken up a position which, as the aide-de-camp naïvely said, he would have been very glad to occupy if the enemy would have let him. All he would allow was that Murat might fall back on Voronovo if he positively could not help it, and that he might send to Moscow for food—a week's job if he had had ample carriage for it.

The decision to quit Moscow seems to have been definitely taken on the fourteenth, for on that day fresh orders were given for removing the wounded, and the twentieth was fixed as the date by which Mozhaisk must be cleared. At the same time such reinforcements as were on their way,

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,264.

especially artillery, of which there was more in Moscow than could be horsed, were turned back to Smolensk, and Junot was told to destroy all spare arms at Mozhaisk and Borodino. Tardy and ineffectual beginnings were made of equipping the soldiers for a march of many days, which must be rapid if it was to be successful, and might at any moment be enormously increased in severity by the advent of winter. On the seventeenth leather and linen were issued to the troops, but it was then too late to get shoes or shirts made, and no attempt was made to provide them with warm clothing or gloves. Except so far as individuals had supplied themselves out of the plunder of Moscow, the soldiers started on the retreat with the clothing they had worn on the advance during the fierce heat of summer. On the other hand the encumbrances of the army, instead of being reduced to a minimum, were greatly increased, partly in ways inevitable under the circumstances, partly wilfully. Sick and wounded who were sufficiently recovered to move naturally joined the march rather than be left in Moscow. They had of course less strength and were worse supplied with necessaries than the men in the ranks, and they died in hundreds, or dropped behind to be captured and often slaughtered by the Cossacks. The French residents in Moscow also tried to escape with the army, and fared equally ill. Napoleon, true to his instinct of giving up nothing, which more than once worked disastrously for him in the sphere of politics, attempted to carry off all the artillery, of which he had a quantity out of all proportion to his army, as proportion was then calculated, and very inadequately horsed: 569 guns and over 2,000 waggons were, according to Chambray's enumeration, the contribution of the artillery to the vast column.

Besides this he had two convoys of spoils, one of treasure, containing besides coined money ingots formed by melting down the precious things found chiefly in the churches of the Kremlin, and one of such trophies as Turkish and other flags which the Russians had captured in war, and a great gilded cross which had no merit except that the Russians valued it highly. Not unnaturally Napoleon's army followed his example: in spite of strenuous orders, the provision waggons were half-filled with valuables which ultimately were nearly all lost; the soldiers put silver cups and pieces of rich silk into their knapsacks instead of bread, at once overloading and starving themselves. No one from the Emperor downwards seemed to take the matter seriously, or realised that they had every prospect of having to struggle for their very lives. The army was doomed to destruction largely through its own lack of proper organisation. If the Russians had left it unmolested, it would have perished of hunger and cold; if the winter could by miracle have been postponed by a month, very few would have withstood both hunger and the Cossacks. Kutusov is severely and justly blamed for his supineness; if he had done his duty, not a man of Napoleon's army in Moscow should have reached Smolensk. But he was so far in the right that most of the work of destroying it was ready done to his hand.

In anticipation of the actual start, instructions were sent to Maret on the 16th as to the explanations he was to give of Napoleon's intentions. He was going to beat Kutusov, seize Kaluga, and then act according to the weather. Anyhow, he should probably early in November take up winter quarters between Smolensk and Minsk; his reason being that "Moscow, which has ceased to exist, is

not a military position for future operations."[1] Still Napoleon could not persuade himself to move; once more he tried to entice Kutusov into negotiation by sending to inquire whether his government had resolved what answer to give to his proposals about mitigating the evils of the war. This time the Russian was not to be tempted. Of the sincerity of his humane desires Napoleon was giving ample proof by the minuteness of his instructions for the total destruction of the Kremlin and of other buildings in Moscow, and by his atrocious order[2] to Berthier to have some Russian soldiers who were found in Moscow shot as incendiaries. How much longer he might have delayed but for Murat's defeat at Vinkovo need not be guessed; when that disaster occurred he set his army in motion with the utmost promptitude.

The numbers of the army on leaving Moscow are given by Chambray with his usual precise care. The infantry, who were on the whole in good condition, were 90,000 strong. They had been in a wretched state when they arrived in Moscow, but they had had a long rest. Those quartered outside the city had suffered considerable hardships, which might have been spared by better management. According to Fezensac,[3] who was himself in Ney's corps outside, the general staff knew and cared little about such matters, or else there might easily have been less waste, and better distribution of the vast stores of good things which Moscow contained. But the men were mainly veterans, well used to take things as they came; and their

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,275.

[2] This is of course not in Nap. Corr., but it is printed in Chambray, iii. 424. Berthier did not execute it, and it turned out that they had been left behind sick.

[3] Fezensac, pp. 240—51.

soldierly pride in making the best possible show under the eyes of the Emperor helped to prevent Napoleon from noticing anything unpleasant. If everything had depended upon the infantry, they were capable of a great deal. The cavalry on the contrary, 14,000 in number, were scarcely fit for service, the horses being in miserable condition from lack of proper food, and the artillery was necessarily in the same state. Indeed the total of the infantry was swelled by no less than 4,000 dismounted horsemen. To these must be added the head-quarters, the engineers, reserve artillery, the men of the hospital and provision trains, etc., etc., whose numbers Chambray estimates at 12,000, all included. And there was also a large mob of non-combatants, invalids from the hospitals, women, fugitive inhabitants of Moscow, whose number can only be guessed at, and who added out of all proportion to their number to the encumbrances impeding the army. A great part of this unwieldy mass was directed upon Vereia and the straight road to Smolensk. It was the fighting force only that was to march towards Kaluga. Whatever Napoleon may have told Maret to give out, he had no real intention of fighting Kutusov in earnest; he hoped to be able to out-manœuvre him, and so open a way for retreat to Smolensk through country as yet exempt from the havoc of war.

Two roads, not greatly diverging, led from Moscow to Kaluga. The old road, which is the straightest, was that on which Kutusov was encamped, some fifty miles from Moscow, his advanced guard under Miloradovich pushed forward to face Murat, who had been obliged after his defeat on the eighteenth to retreat twelve or fifteen miles. The new road lies further west, at an average distance of about fifteen miles from the old one. On it there were no troops

till Napoleon, in anticipation of leaving Moscow, sent a division (Broussier) of the 4th corps to Fominskoie. At this place, where the road crosses the Nara, it is intersected by a cross road starting from near Kutusov's first position behind the Pakhra, and leading to Vereia south of Mozhaisk. Napoleon left Moscow by the old road, but when he reached the Pakhra threw his army across by the side road from the old route to the new, thus threatening to turn Kutusov's position at Tarutino and anticipate him at Kaluga. Why he should ever have started by the old road is unintelligible. He thereby wasted precious time by lengthening the distance to be traversed, and still more by having to move his whole army over at least twenty miles of a bad by-road. Murat and Broussier covered his movements from the observation of the Russians: and the latter general, stationed for a few days at Fominskoie, was so placed as to give the enemy the impression, very possibly true in the first instance, that he had been sent there to watch Dorkhov, who had been occupying Vereia since the tenth with a force chiefly of cavalry, thus seriously threatening the Moscow-Smolensk road. Thiers indeed suggests that Napoleon left Moscow with the full purpose of returning thither, merely intending to punish Kutusov for his treachery in surprising Murat. The charge of treachery is, as has been said, utterly baseless. It is certain that Murat must have been supported or withdrawn, but it is also certain that Napoleon had already told Maret to say that he was leaving Moscow. This he would never have done until it was absolutely decided, since it was in effect confessing to Europe that he could not stay there. Probably the flank march was an after-thought, and a good one. Even if he was going

to fight Kutusov, he would do so to more advantage elsewhere than by attacking the intrenched position at Tarutino. And if Kutusov blundered, and allowed himself to be outflanked, Kaluga could be reached without a battle, or after fighting one under favourable conditions. The only drawback to the flank march was the time thereby lost.

Napoleon's movements, however, seem to indicate no desire to save time. The army began its march from Moscow on the night of the eighteenth, and it was not till the afternoon of the twenty-fourth that the main body came in sight of Maloyaroslavetz, little over sixty miles from Moscow, including the *détour*, though one division had reached that place the previous evening. Except that every hour was of value with winter so near, the success of the operation was in no way compromised by the slowness with which it was conducted. The Russians, whose information was generally good and prompt, thanks to their strength in cavalry regular and irregular, somehow lost this advantage at the critical moment, and it was not till the twenty-second that Kutusov learnt that a French force was at Fominskoie. The impression was that it had been sent thither in order to obtain supplies, as other French corps were known to be doing on the other side of Moscow. Kutusov accordingly ordered Dokhturov with 12,000 infantry, 3,000 cavalry, and 84 guns to march on Fominskoie and drive the French back, Miloradovich being also told to occupy Murat's attention by a demonstration.

Meanwhile the whole French army was slowly carrying out its movement. On the evening of the twenty-second Eugene's corps, which was in advance, was on the new Kaluga road between Fominskoie and Borovsk. Davout and the guard were at Fominskoie. Poniatowski, Murat's

command being broken up, was marching to recover Vereia. Murat, with three of the four cavalry corps, now shrunk to very small dimensions, had followed Davout, while Ney, with the 4th cavalry corps in addition, occupied for the moment Murat's old position. It had rained somewhat during the day, delaying the movement of the troops over the cross roads, and Chambray expresses the opinion that a little more rain would have been really a blessing, as it would have compelled the abandonment of part at least of the vast artillery train which encumbered the retreat, only to be lost piecemeal.

On the twenty-third Poniatowski reached Vereia and drove out Dorkhov, who must have retired by a circuitous route, for Eugene advancing by the high road encountered no enemies. At nightfall Eugene's leading division (Delzons) had reached Maloyaroslavetz, repaired the bridge over the river Luzha, and occupied the little town with two battalions: the rest of the corps was still some way off. Ney's corps was withdrawn in the morning from the old Kaluga road, and followed the rest of the army. Thus Miloradovich found no enemy before him, and promptly reported the fact to Kutusov, who about the same time received other and more direct information which showed plainly what Napoleon was doing. Meanwhile Dokhturov, starting very early from the Tarutino camp, had reached Aristovo, when his cavalry scouts brought back word that a French force estimated at 12,000 men was not five miles off: this was of course Eugene's corps, or part of it. Dokhturov, who had with him Yermolov, the chief of the Russian staff, and Sir R. Wilson, judged the situation correctly. If this was an isolated body, it would not advance further; if it did, it probably had solid support behind it.

He therefore resolved to wait for a while and see if the enemy attacked him. Within an hour came tidings that the whole French army was making its way to the new Kaluga road, and that Moscow was evacuated. Dokhturov immediately did the right thing: he marched as fast as his troops could move for Maloyaroslavetz, as the only place where the French could be intercepted, and sent word to Kutusov of all he knew, asking that the main Russian army should come to his support. Kutusov had already received the same information from Miloradovich, and ought to have seen the urgency of the case, but he adhered to his dilatory policy. The only plea offered to excuse his inaction is the absurdly inadequate one that large foraging parties were out in various directions, for whose return he must wait. The distance from Tarutino to Maloyaroslavetz is less than that which Dokhturov had to march. Yet Dukhturov arrived before daybreak on the twenty-fourth, while Kutusov's leading division did not come up till nearly midday.

Napoleon in person reached Borovsk some time on the twenty-third, and, satisfied that his manœuvre was going to be successful, sent off orders to the generals at Smolensk and Viasma to push out on the south side of the Moscow road, so as to meet him and re-open communications, which would be temporarily suspended. This of course shows clearly that his main object was to reach Smolensk through the undevastated country to the south of the main road, not to fight Kutusov; though a battle might prove necessary, he was not seeking one, but rather aiming at attaining his end without one. The same thing appears in his despatch to Eugene,[1] dated at 7.30 that evening. The language of it

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,303.

gives the impression that his information was very vague, thanks no doubt to his deficiency in cavalry. He tells Eugene in one sentence that he is face to face with the enemy from Fominskoie to the extreme front, and says that Delzons must turn back if he hears cannonading. In another he says that a Russian force which has doubtless been observing him will be that night between Borovsk and Tarutino, and bids Eugene reconnoitre well in that direction in the morning. He gives the Russians credit for no insight at all, supposing that they would only guess his intention of reaching Kaluga round their flank when they find Maloyaroslavetz occupied. As a matter of fact Dokhturov was then in full march for the critical point. Napoleon's confidence in the stupidity of his enemies had betrayed him.

Mortier, meanwhile, had begun the final evacuation of Moscow soon after midnight. He had been left there with the young guard, his own immediate command, to hold the city for a few days, and to give out that Napoleon and his army would return, a pretence which apparently deceived no one. In accordance with Napoleon's orders, mines had been prepared for the destruction of a great part of the Kremlin, and of other buildings. These were fired at the proper time, but did not do as much damage as was intended; and it is suggested that Mortier, disapproving this wanton mischief, was not sorry for the comparative failure. An enormous train of vehicles of all kinds impeded Mortier's march, which was directed on Vereia and thence on Mozhaisk; but even so 1,500 sick and wounded were left in Moscow. Before the French had entirely evacuated the city General Winzingerode, who commanded the Russian force, chiefly of irregular cavalry, watching Moscow on the north, made his way into the streets, and advancing

incautiously without an escort was captured. He tried to get away by the unworthy device of waving a white handkerchief, and pretending that he bore a flag of truce, but was very properly kept a prisoner. When some days later Mortier handed over his captive to Napoleon, the latter, to whom Winzingerode was especially obnoxious, as being a daring and restless enemy, declared that he should be shot as a traitor. Winzingerode was in fact a Wurtemberger by birth, but had entered the Russian service long before his native prince had made himself Napoleon's vassal. To call him a traitor under such circumstances was a monstrous offence against equity and common sense, if not a violation of sound law. Napoleon gave way to Berthier's and Murat's remonstrances and rescinded the order, which may possibly have been merely a specimen of his ordinary brutality of language, never intended to be acted on. He however despatched Winzingerode in custody to France, refusing to accept his parole or allow him to be exchanged. He thus unintentionally did his enemy good service, for he was rescued before reaching the frontier.

The little town of Maloyaroslavetz stands on the south bank of a small river, which flows in a deep channel, crossed by a single bridge. According to Sir R. Wilson there were fords below the town, but these were unknown to the French, and not wanted by the Russians; hence the battle turned largely upon the possession of the bridge. On the south side the ground rises very steeply to a sort of plateau gently sloping away again southwards; the town, built entirely of wood, lay partly on the slope, partly on the summit, with a few isolated buildings down near the bridge. Both east and west of the town the ground was more or less wooded and broken, the descent thence to the stream being even steeper

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than in the town where the Kaluga road passed. On the eastern side it proved possible to place artillery commanding the slope down to the river on the northern side, but from the shape of the ground no spot could be found from which the bridge itself was in sight. Dokhturov, arriving in the dark and having a very imperfect knowledge of the topography, managed to get his troops so far round Maloyaroslavetz as to hold, of course feebly, all the roads leading out of it on the east, south, and west. He expected the French to issue at sunrise, and aimed only at keeping them in check till Kutusov should arrive. Hearing however from some fugitive inhabitants that the French were only two battalions strong, he attacked and dislodged them, but was unable to drive them from the houses near the bridge, which had been fortified, and protected the bridge completely. The rest of Delzons' division tried to come down the northern slope, but were checked by Russian artillery in the nick of time, until Eugene an hour later brought up his own artillery to engage the Russian batteries. Under cover of this fire Delzons' division crossed the river and regained possession of most part of the town, only to be driven out again after a desperate struggle, in which Delzons was killed. Gradually the whole of Dokhturov's force was drawn into the conflict: the town was taken and retaken time after time, but neither could the Russians ever reach the bridge, nor the French gain an inch of ground to the south. Dokhturov's troops, somewhat outnumbered, were nearly exhausted, when Raevski's corps arrived on the scene, the advanced guard of Kutusov's approaching army. This turned the scale for a little while in favour of the Russians, and compelled Eugene to send in his last division (Pino), which as it happened had never been in action during the

campaign. Again the advantage inclined to the French, this time finally, and the Russians abandoned the town altogether, but took up a position so near that their guns commanded all issues from it.

By about one o'clock Napoleon had the bulk of his army within sight of Maloyaroslavetz; but to bring any large additional force across the bridge, reached by a slope which Russian guns commanded, was obviously a very slow and might be a very costly operation. It was not until Dokhturov had retired out of the town, which implied the withdrawal of the Russian artillery on the east of it, that any French artillery could be brought across the bridge to reply to the Russian guns. All this time Napoleon had been able to watch the march of Kutusov's column, and could see that the whole Russian army would be in position before he could reinforce Eugene sufficiently to enable him to advance even against Dokhturov. He therefore contented himself with the success already gained, such as it was, and merely sent part of the 1st corps across to occupy the ground east and west of the town. Cannonading and a desultory infantry fire were kept up far into the night, but there was no more serious fighting.

Maloyaroslavetz is in many respects a most remarkable and important battle; in fact it has sometimes been cited as the turning point in Napoleon's career, and therefore one of the decisive events of history. If any one battle is to be selected as the turning point, Maloyaroslavetz is doubtless the right one to select. It put an end to all chance of his retreat being effected with any show of success. His expedition had substantially failed; this day converted failure into destruction, and made his

ultimate overthrow a certainty when his enemies combined against him, a step to which his Russian disaster gave obvious encouragement. And yet, momentous as were its consequences, it was a battle on a small scale. Eugene's corps was about 25,000 strong, and it was not reinforced. Dokhturov began with only 15,000; and the addition of Raevski, who arrived as has been seen late in the action, must have left the Russian total still rather below the French. Perhaps the little force which came in from Vereia under Dorkhov, who was killed before the day ended, may have made the balance even. It would obviously be misleading to reckon in with the forces engaged either those divisions of Davout's corps that crossed the river in the evening, or the bulk of Kutusov's army, though both may have lost a few men before the action died away. The losses from the nature of the case were extremely heavy in proportion to the numbers, and fairly equal. The probabilities would seem in favour of the French having suffered most, seeing that the descent to the bridge from the north was commanded by Russian artillery, but this was perhaps balanced by the Russians having finally to abandon their wounded in the town. Sir R. Wilson goes so far as to estimate the losses at nearly 10,000 men on each side, but other authorities give lower figures; two-thirds of this would probably be rather below the mark. At any rate the version current in the French army at the time, that 16,000 men had fought 70,000 Russians, inflicting a loss of 8,000 and suffering one of 3,000, is a fair specimen of the falsehoods which it was thought necessary to spread abroad in order to prevent discouragement.

The formation of the ground accounts for one peculiarity

of the battle. It would be hard to find another instance of a fraction of an army waging a long and desperate conflict, while the main body looked on and gave no help. It was practically impossible for Napoleon to bring more men into the field until too late for anything but a general action, and that he decided not to risk. The shape of the ground prevented the Russians at an early stage from seizing and destroying the bridge, which would have rendered them unassailable; later it enabled them to assume a position which shut up the French in the blood-soaked ruins of the town. In valour and endurance there was nothing to choose between the two sides. Both knew the supreme importance of the stake for which they were contending, and fought for it with an obstinacy hard to surpass. Tactically the French may be said to have had a slight advantage; they could truly claim to have gained a few yards of ground after all the fluctuations of the conflict. Strategically the Russians gained a great victory; in Napoleon's position not to win decisively was to be beaten.

No reader can fail to be struck by the parallel between this battle and Lubino. In both cases a Russian detachment had to fight to the death in order to gain time for the main army to reach a position. In both cases this object was attained completely, though at great cost. In both cases the French seemed as if they might have overwhelmed their enemies, but failed to do so, at Lubino through not realising their opportunity, at Maloyaroslavetz through the difficulties of the ground. The details of the topography and of the fighting, and the immediate results, differ greatly. The ultimate result of both was the same: the splendid endurance of the Russian troops, utilised by

good tactics on the actual field, retrieved the mistakes of the commander-in-chief.

It is probably needless to say that Napoleon in his bulletin misrepresents Maloyaroslavetz as grossly as Lubino. In fact the twenty-seventh bulletin is a tissue of falsehoods, not merely as to the issue of the fighting and the losses sustained, but as to the whole drift of the operations. According to it, the French army would have moved on Vereia but for hearing that the enemy had suddenly broken up his Tarutino camp and marched on Maloyaroslavetz, whereupon it became necessary to disconcert his plans. It implies a complete defeat of the Russian army; it asserts that the whole French army occupied on the day after the battle the position which the Russians had been driven from. It goes on to state that the Emperor had ordered a general attack for the twenty-sixth, but found that the enemy had decamped, whereon he pursued them for some hours and then let them go. The only scrap of truth in this farrago rests on the fact that Kutusov in the night of the twenty-fourth changed his mind about remaining in his very advantageous position, which it would have been simply impossible for Napoleon to assail with any reasonable chance of success. At 2 a.m. he sent for his staff, and to their great disgust gave orders for an immediate retreat of more than two miles, thus leaving open the western road to Medyn. The only excuse for this act of folly or cowardice was that the Kaluga road a mile or two from Maloyaroslavetz passed through a very awkward defile, which would have rendered retreat in case of defeat very difficult. But, as all but Kutusov were convinced, defeat under the circumstances was impossible; the Russians would have welcomed an attack with

Napoleon's whole strength, as the most suicidal act he could commit.

About the same hour Napoleon, who had his quarters at Gorodnia, a village between Borovsk and Maloyaroslavetz, sent for Berthier, Murat, and Bessières. After speaking of the state of affairs, he put his elbows on the table and his head between his hands, and sat gazing at the map for an hour without uttering a word. In that bitter moment he perhaps realised for the first time that he had failed irretrievably. He did not however even yet abandon all thought of the offensive. Dismissing the marshals without telling them his purpose, he sent orders to Ney to come up in rear, leaving troops at and beyond Borovsk to guard the artillery and baggage train. He also told Davout to take command of the advanced portion of the army, intimating that he should come to the front in person with the guard. Kutusov's ill-advised retreat in the night must have been conducted with great skill and good order, for the French apparently never discovered that it was going on. When Davout in the morning drew out his troops, he found that he could take possession of the ground immediately to the south of Maloyaroslavetz, but he had missed the chance of troubling the Russian passage through the defile which now separated him from them, and he could advance no further.

In the morning Napoleon started for the front with his usual small escort, the cavalry of the guard following at a little distance. Suddenly a body of Cossacks dashed out of a wood on the right, and Napoleon would have been captured if the guard had not come up in time. Then the Cossacks dispersed, but they carried off eleven guns, and might have taken many more but for the accident

that the artillery horses had been led far away to water. This delayed Napoleon's arrival at Maloyaroslavetz, but he persisted in going thither and minutely inspecting the battle-field after his usual fashion, and then returned to Gorodnia for the night. This waste of a day, when every hour might be of consequence, was a grave mistake: it may probably be explained by the conflict going on in Napoleon's mind, whether he should only think of escape, as all about him desired, or still make some attempt to retain an attitude of superiority. The Cossacks during this day also pounced on Borovsk, doing much mischief, and checked Poniatowski's march westwards from Vereia. His own narrow escape, and these repeated proofs of the strength and ubiquity of the enemy's light cavalry, may have contributed to form his decision. At any rate on the morning of the twenty-sixth he made up his mind to retreat *viâ* Mozhaisk on Smolensk, not even attempting to utilise the road west from Maloyaroslavetz, which was some forty miles shorter. Critics declare this to have been a serious mistake: the fighting force could have gone that way, while the trains, escorted by Junot and Mortier already at Mozhaisk or near it, took the chief road. Victor had already been told to push out a division to Ielnia, some distance from Smolensk in this direction; and it may safely be assumed that the troops marching through a region not much devastated would have gained by the change, since they obtained very little food before reaching Smolensk except what they carried with them. The roads, though bad, were probably as good as the high road worn by the endless trains of waggons. Probably Napoleon thought it not safe enough from a flank attack, though as a matter of fact Kutusov had given him start enough for this to

be impossible except with cavalry. Or he may have simply given way to the wishes of his officers, who apparently, like the Emperor himself, underrated the perils before them, and thought it better to face the known evils of the known route rather than adventure on anything new.

The French writers, even Chambray, in discussing the chances of a general action, which was the only alternative to retreat *viâ* Mozhaisk, think Napoleon would have won it. His infantry, they say, was so good as to be invincible, even with some odds against them. The reason why they approve his decision is that after a victory he would have been encumbered with thousands of wounded, who would have seriously hindered his march. Seeing the enormous mass of *impedimenta* already moving with the army, and the lack of means for conveying any more, he could certainly not have carried off the wounded from another battle. But in truth victory was very far from probable, almost impossible, and if it had been gained could not have been utilised for lack of cavalry. Borodino is conclusive evidence on this point. There Napoleon with slightly superior numbers, attacking a moderately strong position, succeeded after a frightfully bloody struggle in forcing the Russians back a mile or two. South of Maloyaroslavetz there was a stronger position to assail, and if defeated he would have had a river behind him. Moreover the balance of numbers was heavily against him. The maximum of troops that could have taken part in a battle was little if anything over 70,000, Poniatowski, Mortier, etc., being at a distance; whereas Kutusov certainly had 100,000, his main superiority being in cavalry. It is unreasonable to suppose that the difference in

quality of the infantry could have compensated for such numerical inferiority and disadvantages of position. Napoleon, there can be no doubt, adopted the only prudent course when he accepted the check as fatal to his hope of reaching Kaluga.

At the same time, if he had only known it, history would have repeated itself. As, after the drawn battle of Eylau, the French were able to claim the advantage because the Russians were the first to retreat, so it would have been again. Kutusov had made up his mind to retreat to Kaluga if Napoleon showed any signs of seriously attacking him. In fact the Russian troops were beginning to move, in anticipation of it, at the moment when Napoleon resolved to march on Mozhaisk. Had the Emperor made one more demonstration, had he even held his ground one more day, the way would have been obligingly thrown open for him, and he would have attained the object he had in view in facing Kutusov at all, that of returning through a fertile and inhabited country. Sir R. Wilson is reasonably severe on the conduct of Kutusov, who in defiance of all remonstrance insisted on throwing away all that the heroism of Dokhturov's corps had gained. What his motives were may be doubted: according to Wilson he during one discussion said that he did not wish for Napoleon's total overthrow, as it would be to the advantage not of Russia but of England. If this was not a mere ebullition of ill-temper, provoked by the Englishman's attempts to influence him, it means that he let his political views regulate his military conduct, a course intelligible in a sovereign but inexcusable in a general, and specially so in one who had been raised to the chief command through the national belief that he would carry on the war with

the utmost vigour. So far from doing this, he never from the day of Borodino acted with any vigour at all. Had he done so, at any rate after October began, the horrors of the French retreat would have been spared in a very summary fashion, and Bautzen, Leipzig, and Waterloo need never have been fought.

CHAPTER XI.

BEGINNING OF THE RETREAT.

Napoleon, having reluctantly come to the conclusion that he must retreat by the Moscow-Smolensk road, directed his whole army into it by the nearest route. Only Poniatowski was sent by cross roads to Gzhatsk, in order to cover the left flank from possible attack. He still represented to his lieutenants at a distance that it was a purely voluntary movement, made in order to place himself in better touch with his wings. Possibly he believed this himself, for his conduct in several respects, at any rate down to his arrival at Smolensk, suggests that he was not merely showing a bold front to the enemy, but that he thought himself superior in strength. There was no attempt to hasten the march, which with the enormous train of vehicles covered an immense distance, and would have been slow even if there had been plenty of horses in good condition. There was a disproportionate amount of artillery, more than the enfeebled horses could draw, which in fact was most of it lost piecemeal. Napoleon insisted on all being kept; when a corps commander proposed to abandon part of his artillery in order to preserve the remainder, he forbade it as dishonouring to a victorious army.[1] Generals dared not disobey openly;

[1] Chambray, ii. 367.

indeed most of them were themselves offenders against proper military rules, in having carriages laden with their personal effects, and allowing their subordinates to do the like. But Chambray tells from his own knowledge, how one general of artillery half emptied his ammunition waggons, instead of destroying those he could not convey, in order to appear to have abandoned nothing.

Junot's corps, now reduced to 1,200 men, was at Mozhaisk when the movement began, and therefore led the way. Davout naturally formed the rear-guard, he having been left opposite Kutusov when Napoleon turned back from Maloyaroslavetz; and Eugene was next in front of him. It was not till the twenty-eighth that Napoleon himself reached Mozhaisk, and passed over the field of Borodino, where many thousands of corpses still lay unburied. There were no inhabitants who could be forced to discharge this duty, and the French had not attempted, perhaps had been unable, to bury more than their own dead. A considerable number of wounded had been left behind in the great convent, which had been converted into a hospital, Junot not having transport enough for all. Napoleon ordered one or two to be put on every waggon or other vehicle, so that they might be conveyed away. This is another indication how little he realised the true state of things. Whether his humanity was genuine or interested, he did not intend to sign their death-warrant, as in fact he did. There was no provision for these unfortunates being fed or tended; they were put into the hands of men who had not food enough for themselves, to whom they were a serious additional encumbrance, and they naturally fared badly. It may be doubted whether one of them saw even Smolensk. Left in the

hospital, they might, or might not, have been properly cared for by the Russians; but at least they would have had a chance.

On the night of the twenty-eighth Napoleon heard from Davout, who halted that day at Borovsk, that he had seen no enemies except a few Cossacks. This suggested the probability that Kutusov was marching to cut off the French retreat, the natural point for him to aim at for this purpose being Viasma.

Napoleon therefore made his guard, which was in better condition than the rest of the army, push forward as rapidly as possible, and accompanied them himself, reaching Viasma on the thirty-first. On that day the army was spread out over a distance of sixty miles, Junot being a little way west of Viasma, and Davout only one march beyond Mozhaisk. The latter had certainly moved more slowly than under the real conditions was wise; he had delayed to protect ammunition waggons and baggage that had better have been abandoned at once, and had halted to show fight whenever the Cossacks threatened him. He had certainly had no instructions to the contrary, and was just the man to carry out orders with grim pertinacity whatever it cost, though he might very probably have acted in a different way as his own master. This slowness was highly injurious to the army, as the corps in front of Davout necessarily regulated its pace by his, and so on. It gave time for even the tardy movements which Kutusov allowed; and it helped to starve the soldiers, whose supplies were failing, and who could not expect to find food on the route any sooner than Smolensk. As far as Mozhaisk the country passed through had not been entirely laid bare, and forage was

procurable with some trouble; but even there the rear-guard had found everything eaten up or destroyed. After Mozhaisk it was infinitely worse; nothing was to be had within a day's journey of the road, and the horses died in hundreds. The soldiers had by this time no bread left and no brandy,[1] though some few may have still had scanty remnants of their private plunder brought away from Moscow. Most of the beasts brought to supply meat had been killed and eaten, and there was not the remotest possibility of replacing them. Practically there was nothing but the flesh of the horses which hour by hour broke down. Moreover, though the weather was still fine and bright, it had begun to freeze at night, and the cold of the bivouacs rapidly exhausted the men, who got no real rest, slow as was the progress of the army. Those who wandered away in search of food never came back. Some lost themselves and died of hunger and exhaustion; many were taken by the Cossacks; those who went far enough away were probably killed by the peasantry. Hundreds threw away their arms in the hope of being able to go further without the weight to carry, and served to swell the mob of helpless non-combatants which impeded the movement of the whole. Hundreds more died by the wayside, or proved unable to start again after a halt, so that every bivouac when deserted looked as if it had been the scene of a skirmish. With every swoop of the Cossacks stragglers were cut down or captured, and in many cases slaughtered by them. When the first serious combat took place on the third of November, the corps which took part in it had been reduced, according to Chambray's statement, to 37,500

[1] Chambray, ii. 365.

men. They left Moscow, according to the same authority, 73,275 strong, and upon them had fallen the losses of Maloyaroslavetz, which with other trifling losses before the battle may be fairly estimated at 7,000 men. Thus in eight days of the definite retreat these corps, the major part of the army, had been reduced by somewhat more than forty per cent. of their strength. The guard and Junot's corps, which were in advance, had probably suffered less in proportion, but the other scanty remnants of the cavalry had lost even more in efficiency, owing to the difficulty of keeping the horses fed. A certain number of the soldiers who had thus disappeared from the effective list were doubtless included in the unarmed mob, but for fighting purposes they were utterly lost; and all this had happened before a flake of snow had fallen. It was not the winter which defeated Napoleon, but the inadequacy of his arrangements to cope with the gigantic difficulties of his self-imposed task.

The horrors of the retreat from Moscow have been described hundreds of times; many survivors have recorded their own experiences, and historians have collated these accounts to form a picture of the whole. There may well have been exaggeration here and there, incidents told as facts within the writer's knowledge which were really on hearsay, heightening of the colours of things which did happen. The conditions were so striking that imagination may well be believed to have played eye-witnesses false. It was obviously never possible to sift the evidence in detail, so as to discover whether any specially appalling stories were literally true. But the general impression conveyed by all writers cannot mislead; the sufferings were horrible, were inflicted by a combination of the worst evils which

could beset men so situated. There was lack of adequate food from the first, growing gradually worse till it became actual starvation, to battle against which men had recourse to the most disgusting expedients. There was cold after a time, steadily growing more severe, and all the more deadly in its effects because want of food and incessant fatigue were continually lowering the vitality of the soldiers. Misery is apt to engender reckless brutality in some sufferers, callous selfishness in many more; one cannot wonder at reading of men falling helpless by the wayside and being stripped by their comrades before the breath was out of their bodies. The enemies too who incessantly harassed the march were largely either half-savage Cossacks, or peasants infuriated by their own sufferings at the hands of the invaders. The testimony of Sir R. Wilson, who was with the Russian army throughout, is perhaps more emphatic than that of any French eye-witness as to the hideous cruelty perpetrated. No good purpose can be served by merely describing over again these sickening horrors. The mere comparison of the numbers and condition of the army when it left Moscow, with the state of the remnant which crossed the Niemen two months later, will suffice.

On the other hand the heroism of the French during their retreat is as much a commonplace of history as their sufferings. The two pictures are not quite consistent. Heroes do not rob their dying comrades, or rush madly to plunder stores which properly used may alleviate the hunger of thousands besides themselves. Heroes do not throw away their arms and shamble despairingly along till they too drop by the roadside. Heroism there was, and of the highest order; the officers generally, and many

of the rank and file, did their duty to the last under the most trying conditions, made all the worse by the failure of others. It is only fair to their memory, as well as required by historical truth, to discriminate, though it can only be done generally.

Men are very differently constituted as to their capacity to endure pain, especially prolonged sufferings. The nervous energy which enables a man to bear up against pain is as much a variable quantity, though rather more under the control of his will, as the strength of his digestion or the muscular power in his arms and legs. Those who give way to sufferings which are to them unendurable are to be pitied, not blamed, even when their comrades bear up. The same temperature, the same number of hours without food, will probably not try any two men quite equally. A large proportion of the fugitives from Moscow simply had no chance for their lives; they died of wounds, of frost-bite, of collapse, without the possibility of making further efforts, and it is obviously futile to speculate how they would have behaved under more prolonged trial. Many also were doomed from the start; it was physically impossible that men already broken by illness should bear the hardships of the retreat. But besides these a considerable number perished sooner than they need have done, because they gave way. They struggled on, so long as life and liberty were dear to them; but the time came to many when the hope of preserving either seemed too dim and distant to be worth contending for at the cost of continued present effort, and they threw themselves despairingly down to become prisoners or to die, or haply both. Others, and these judging by the general tenour of all narratives must have been numerous,

were demoralised before they were disabled. Such men deserted the ranks, threw away their muskets, and lived mainly by robbing the helpless. They continued with the army, as the safest place; escaping the toils of sentry duty and the burden of their arms, they fared less badly than their betters, and were a standing nuisance, lowering the chances of all and doing nothing to help the common cause. They do not perhaps deserve very harsh condemnation; their ordeal was an extremely severe one for men most of them originally of no education, brutalised by years of the habits engendered in making war support war, and they could not stand the test. All the more honour to those who, besides the bodily strength to endure, possessed the moral strength to struggle on rather than yield to the promptings of fatigue or drowsiness, to do what duty required for the common cause rather than care first for their own skins. The officers of course fared better than the rank and file. They had naturally more education, or if they had risen from the ranks rather better abilities than the average; and they had had better opportunities on the average of supplying themselves at Moscow, and more judgment as to how to do it. Thus they tended to suffer rather less privation, and they would in general have more forethought, and realise more thoroughly the consequences of giving way. The sense of honour too tended to be stronger in them; officers were not to be found among the horde of skulkers[1] who became little better than banditti. Hence the number of officers who survived was out of all proportion large, fortunately for Napoleon's chances in 1813. To give an illustration, a

[1] This may be an exaggeration, but in the many narratives I have read I do not remember any distinct mention of officers among them.

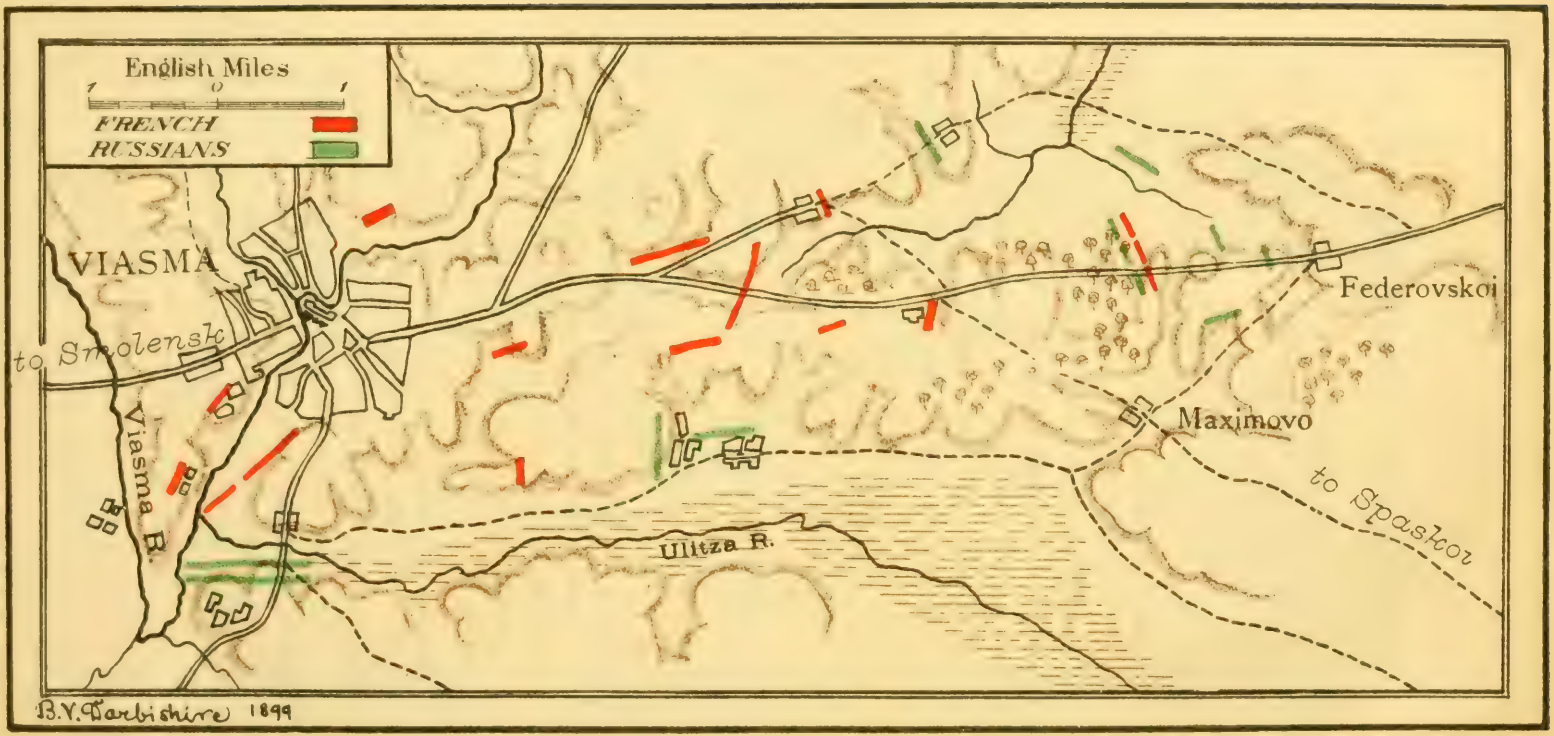
paper was found at the Berezina which happened to contain the field state of certain French battalions when they started eastwards from Smolensk, and also when they had just passed it on the return. In those three months the number of rank and file had fallen from 1,449 to 73; but of 119 officers 69 were still serving.[1] Again, all the more honour to the privates, who without these intellectual advantages never lost heart, never shirked their duty. Many died at their post, some escaped, but all deserve in the fullest sense the much abused title of hero.

During the first week of the retreat the Russians did not contribute very much to the work of destroying their enemy. Kutusov adhered to his policy of merely harassing the enemy, rather than attempting to overwhelm them. This conduct is lauded by his admirers as supremely wise, seeing that he avoided expending his soldiers' lives in doing what cold and hunger would accomplish for him. It is also decried by his critics as cowardly, almost treacherous, dereliction of duty. This is probably putting the case too strongly; it looks more like extreme caution verging on inertness, rather than wilfully refusing to do his best for his country. But the argument urged in his favour is entirely unsound. He unquestionably ought to have pressed the French with all his might after Maloyaroslavetz, if not after Vinkovo. The chances of cutting off Napoleon's retreat altogether, and forcing him to surrender for lack of food, were to say the least in his favour. Such a success would have been far more striking as a triumph, and far less costly in lives, than the pursuit as he conducted it. It might be replied that he did not know the state to which his enemy was reduced, but if so it was his

[1] Hardenberg, Mémoires, xi.

own fault. His superiority in cavalry was so great that he could easily have obtained information by ordinary reconnoitring, to say nothing of the fact that he was in his own country, so that the inhabitants of the places occupied by the French, as many as had remained in their homes, were friendly to him. Indeed the Russian light horse was always hovering about Moscow, and about the army on the first days of the retreat. Fezensac expressly mentions how Ney's corps was troubled by Cossacks while crossing in the rear of the rest, from the old Kaluga road to the new one. Kutusov was not unaware of the facts which gave him his opportunity; he was blind, more or less wilfully blind, to their significance.

Despite all the pressure put on him by his generals, perhaps in consequence of that pressure, Kutusov persisted in following his own plan; and assuming the fundamental idea to be right, it was worked out with skill and judgment. Platov with a large body of Cossacks and a division of infantry was sent in direct pursuit. On a line where no subsistence was procurable comparatively few troops could move, and the Cossacks, accustomed to a very hard life and extremely mobile, obviously felt it least. The main army marched straight for Viasma, passing thus through country not yet ruined by the war, and having a somewhat shorter route than the French. So deliberate were Kutusov's movements that he let the French pass Viasma before he was quite within striking distance. His advanced guard however, a force of all arms under Miloradovich nearly 20,000 strong, was directed on Gzhatsk by an intermediate line, so as to be close on the flank of the French. A body of cavalry was also pushed forwards towards Ielnia, on the direct way to Smolensk. These would serve either



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to check any French force which might be coming out by that route to meet Napoleon, as was in fact the case, or they might be used to threaten his flank at some point nearer Smolensk.

On the first of November Miloradovich with his cavalry was within reach of the French line of march, some distance east of Viasma, but he would attempt no attack without his infantry, and therefore merely kept in touch with them as the successive corps filed westwards that day and the next. On the morning of the third his whole force was near enough to make a bold stroke possible. Napoleon with the guard was some way west of Viasma, Ney was in the ruins of the town, Eugene and Poniatowski a little distance to the east, so as not to be too far from Davout, who had barely reached Fedorovskoe. At eight in the morning Miloradovich's cavalry came on to some high ground south of the road between Viasma and Fedorovskoe. The viceroy had almost reached the former place, Davout's corps was beginning to emerge from the latter. Miloradovich audaciously sent a brigade of cavalry down into the high road, while the rest of his cavalry with their guns formed line facing northwards. The infantry at the same time moved to the left behind the cavalry, so as to continue the line almost to Viasma. The first brigade, charging into the head of Davout's column, won some temporary advantage, but was ultimately forced to give way : one regiment was indeed compelled to escape northwards and join Platov. Meantime however a Russian division under Eugene of Wurtemberg had formed across the high road behind them, with its back to Viasma, and received Davout with a heavy fire, as his crowded columns broke through the Russian cavalry. Platov's Cossacks and the infantry division supporting them

were at the same time pressing hard on Davout's right flank and rear. It would have gone very hard with Davout if the viceroy had not brought some of his troops back from Viasma to assist his colleague. On being informed of this movement Miloradovich ordered Eugene of Wurtemberg to withdraw, so as not to be enclosed by the enemy coming up in rear. Eugene in his narrative[1] maintains that this was unnecessary: no very great force, he argues, would have sufficed to hold the viceroy in check, especially in view of the fact that the French artillery could only be moved slowly because of the bad state of the horses, whereas the Russian was in excellent condition. Whether in fact the number of French returning from Viasma was so small as to make this contention valid, is open to doubt. The French narratives are somewhat indistinct as to the movements of the troops on their side, and the exact timing of them. It is certain, however, that the viceroy alone could have brought back to the rescue of Davout a force amply sufficient to crush the Russian division that intervened. It is certain also that Miloradovich, a man absolutely fearless, would not have ordered it to retreat unless he had been convinced, on the information he possessed, that it was really necessary. At any rate the order was executed, Eugene of Wurtemberg wheeled back into the general line, and Davout got past. He however suffered very heavily, as he had to run the gauntlet of the Russian fire on his left, besides the losses inflicted by Platov.

On effecting his junction with the viceroy, Davout halted, and the French for a short time faced the enemy, as if challenging them to attack. Ney's corps was close behind, and Poniatowski's on the left of the viceroy; thus their

[1] Erinnerungen, p. 142.

numbers, in spite of what Davout had lost, were decidedly superior to what the Russians had on the field. Before the action began the French total was about 37,000, the Russians, Platov's force included, hardly exceeded 25,000; but of course the major part of the French and a less proportion of the Russians took no share in the fighting. The number of Russians that actually assailed Davout hardly equalled his; but they had great and obvious advantages of position, and in the superiority of their cavalry and artillery. That Davout's men should have been considerably disordered by the sudden attack was inevitable, and is no imputation on their courage or discipline. That they passed through the ordeal successfully, after the trials of the last week, was creditable to them, but it was no feat of exceptional heroism. The claim to victory, which Napoleon made in his twenty-eighth bulletin, is of course preposterous, and Thiers' account, which implies that the whole Russian army tried in vain to bar Davout's passage, and asserts that the French inflicted at least double the loss which they sustained, is equally mendacious. That the day did not see the destruction of the greater part of Napoleon's army was due to Kutusov only. He was within a very few miles of Viasma, and might easily have taken part in the action if he had so pleased. One Russian authority states what may be taken as a lame excuse for Kutusov, that Miloradovich's despatch on the night of the second, which should have stated his plan of attack for the next day, proved on being opened to contain a blank sheet of paper; through this misadventure it is suggested that he was ignorant of his lieutenant's purpose, and therefore failed to co-operate. If the story be true, one might suspect Miloradovich of a device analogous to that ascribed to

Nelson, of putting the telescope to his blind eye: he meant to fight, and would not give his chief the opportunity of interfering to forbid it. Buturlin however knows nothing of this, and attributes Kutusov's inaction to deliberate prudence, he being under the impression that the French were superior in numbers to what they really were.

There was some little hesitation among the French after they were reunited. Neither of the marshals had any authority over the others, and a sort of council of war was held, which decided on continuing the retreat. No other conclusion could possibly have been arrived at; if the supreme command had been in the hands of the most reckless of fighting generals, he must have seen the imperative necessity of following the rest of the army, to say nothing of the probability that Kutusov would next day fall on Viasma with strength practically irresistible. Ney, who had been ordered to relieve Davout of the rear-guard duty after Viasma, reported to Napoleon next morning[1] in terms which in no way disguised the greatness of the disaster, and blamed Davout's soldiers very severely for the disorder into which they had fallen. He was perhaps too hard on his colleague, though he himself proved capable of keeping his men well in hand through far greater trials of their endurance and at least equal danger from the enemy. Davout had always been so distinguished for the care he took of his troops, and the good order and discipline he maintained, that even comparative failure among his men excites surprise. Possibly they were for that very reason less able to bear the first relaxation of discipline, such as the retreat rendered almost inevitable. They had been the first to find themselves in a position of inferiority to the

[1] Chambray, ii. 374.

enemy, of helplessness to escape from incessant harassing, and they were not quite equal to the strain. Ney was loved, while Davout was feared; the former was therefore the more likely to win his men to achieve miracles. The halo of glory, which has always hung over the army that followed Napoleon back from Moscow, ought really to be concentrated on the head of Ney.

The retreat on Smolensk was continued without any important military incident, at least on the main route. Ney of course had continued fighting, as was to be expected, which grew more serious as he approached Smolensk. Fezensac, who commanded a regiment in Ney's corps, gives a most vivid account of the march. The work, which was of course extremely severe, was very carefully apportioned, so that the various regiments should share equally in the heaviest tasks. Even in the rear-guard men were frequently throwing away their arms, and impeding their comrades who held firm to their duty. Fezensac tells how, on the first night that his regiment was in the extreme rear, he drove the stragglers mercilessly away from the bivouacs. It would have been well for the whole army if they had always been so treated: such harshness, fully merited by their conduct, might have deterred others from following their example, besides lightening the whole march. Ordinary humanity of course dictated doing what was possible for wretches who certainly had not come to Russia by their own choice, but as a matter of fact little could be saved and much was lost. The marshal was in no humour to spare his men: on one occasion when some troops had been driven by superior force out of a position which he had wished to hold somewhat longer, he asked what they wanted more than a good opportunity *pour se*

faire tuer. At the same time this was no mere fire-eating: he repeatedly warned Napoleon both of the increasing difficulty of his own immediate task, and also of the fact that Russian troops were steadily passing him on the south of the road.

It was possibly owing to Ney's information that Napoleon abandoned a plan which he had formed for halting to receive battle in a position a little east of Dorogobuzh. This plan was fully committed to writing,[1] but fortunately for him was never executed. It was based on the assumption that the whole Russian army was following him on the direct route, whereas he ought to have known from the reports of the action at Viasma that this was by no means the case. It assumed also the possibility of surprising the Russians, who would think that they were merely pressing a rear-guard, and were to find themselves suddenly engaged with the whole army. This was virtually impossible in view of the enormous superiority of the enemy in cavalry, to say nothing of the information derived from prisoners. Whatever defects the Russians may have exhibited, they thoroughly understood how to use their light horse. Worst of all, it assumed a tolerable equality of strength, for which the time was long past. To fight and not be decisively successful meant ruin; and an inferior force in the best of defensive positions can never expect more than to inflict a sharp repulse, and that not unless the enemy chooses to attack. Given the correctness of Napoleon's other assumptions, the enemy had only to turn his position, abstaining from seriously assailing it in front, and he must retreat, having lost invaluable time. It was another instance of Napoleon's inability to look the facts

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,320.

in the face, though the more than confident tone of the order of the day,[1] drawn up but not issued, may well have been assumed to encourage the soldiers.

In the course of this stage, however, the third enemy entered the field against the French, more destructive than Kutusov ever allowed the Russians to be, and giving tenfold power to their other enemy, hunger. On the fifth of November a little snow fell, and on the sixth there was a heavy fall, accompanied by extremely cold wind. Napoleon had announced in his bulletin of the twenty-seventh of October that the beautiful weather would continue for eight days longer, in which time the army would be in its new quarters. The first portion of the prophecy was fulfilled pretty accurately, but the second was very far from fulfilment. Not a man of the Moscow army had reached Smolensk when the winter began in earnest, and Smolensk proved to be only a momentary halting-place. The most immediate effect was the marked acceleration in the rate of destruction of the horses. With the earth covered everywhere with a white pall, it became impossible to procure the scantiest food for them by foraging. Moreover the snow on the road was soon worn smooth and slippery. The horses had not been rough-shod, nor had any means been provided for doing this when it should become necessary, except by the Polish cavalry. Hence the labour of drawing vehicles became far greater even on level ground; at every slope the horses were virtually helpless. Every gun, every carriage, had to be shoved up the ascents by the soldiers; on every declivity the horses

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,320. The first words of it are: "It is the will of the Emperor, if the enemy's infantry pursues the army, de l'attaquer, de la culbuter, et de la faire en partie prisonnière ! ! "

were liable to be carried off their feet by the weight behind, and few that had once fallen ever rose again. The starving mob were only too glad to feed on their carcases, for there was little else to eat. Hour by hour vehicles had to be abandoned, and the owners were lucky if they were able to select in peace such of the contents as they had strength to carry on their own backs, before their property was ransacked by others. The number of stragglers, men who had probably thrown away their arms and certainly had cast off all the restraints of discipline, increased[1] apace, and their lawless violence increased almost as rapidly. Men literally starving easily degenerate into wild beasts, and the habits and training of Napoleon's veterans were such as to make those among them who were not faithful to duty and discipline very formidable wild beasts. Ney was not the man to overstate evils, and it may safely be assumed also that the bulk of the stragglers were ahead of the rear-guard, crowding and disorganising the corps less exposed to danger. Yet his picture of the difficulties which they caused to him in the discharge of his arduous duty[2] gives a sufficiently vivid idea of what was going on over fifty miles of road.

From Dorogobuzh Eugene's corps was directed on Dukhovchina, with the idea that from thence it might move on Vitepsk, if it should prove expedient to reinforce the northern wing, or rejoin the central army at Smolensk. Critics say that Napoleon would have done better to move from the first on two or three roads, and it is possible that the advantages of relieving the main route would have

[1] Thiers gives the total number of non-combatants leaving Dorogobuzh as 50,000, but he cites no authority.

[2] Ney to Berthier, Chambray, ii. 377.

compensated for the additional fatigue of marching over by-roads. Certainly a column sixty miles from head to rear was at least as much exposed to attack from the enemy as two or three separate columns could have been. But the case was considerably altered as soon as the ground was covered with snow. By-roads become proportionately much more difficult than high roads which have had even moderate care bestowed on their construction. And this is especially the case in Russia, where, though the general surface is level, every stream has worn for itself a deep channel with steep banks. Eugene's corps, taking only a minimum of artillery and no baggage, would probably have found the cross roads nearly as hard work as going straight on to Smolensk. To let it attempt to convey all its artillery and baggage (which included also a number of stragglers and other non-combatants) was to doom it to losses approaching to destruction. There is no ascertaining who was responsible; doubtless the officers of the 4th corps felt that they should never see their baggage again if it was left to follow the high road. As it was, the corps lost not only its baggage and most of its artillery—that was inevitable in any case—but also a very large proportion of its men.

The appearance of the snow influenced the Russians' movements also. In face of the increased difficulty of subsistence Miloradovich drew off his infantry southwards into the Ielnia-Smolensk road, leaving only cavalry to harass the march of the French as far as Smolensk. Platov, who had been hovering on the northern flank, followed Eugene, and made desultory attacks on all parts of his column, but without doing serious damage. Such were the difficulties of the way however that the corps

took three whole days to reach the little river Vop, about thirty miles from Dorogobuzh, and that not without being on the march from twelve to fourteen hours a day. Eugene's own report to Berthier,[1] written before the passage of the river, mentions having already lost 1,200 horses, and anticipates abandoning two-thirds of the artillery. The reality proved even worse than the anticipation. The river, which is but small, was frozen over, but the ice was as yet thin. An attempt to make a bridge failed through lack of proper materials, and it became necessary to ford. The Italian guards led the way with water up to their chests, and drove off the Cossacks who were hovering all around. Many soldiers were drowned in the freezing water, many more were fatally chilled through inability to dry their clothes. Then an attempt was made to bring over the guns and baggage; but so many stuck in the muddy bottom of the stream that the ford was entirely blocked, and all but a few had to be abandoned. The disorder arising through the owners of vehicles trying to take out their property, and the stragglers plundering indiscriminately, caused infinite delay. At nightfall the division which had been covering the passage was still on the left bank. Next morning the corps was able to reach Dukhovchina, the Cossacks giving way before infantry in close order, and found some slight compensation for their toils. The little town, lying well away from the main road, had not been deserted, and food was therefore procurable. The corps however, which had

[1] This despatch was intercepted by the Russians, and a copy was sent to England, which is in R. O. Sweden, 219, under date the twenty-third of November. The substance of it was published in the English newspapers.

passed Viasma fully 12,000 strong, was reduced to 6,000, and only twelve guns were left out of more than ninety with which it had started from Moscow. After a day's rest Eugene moved on Smolensk, where he arrived on the thirteenth. Whether he knew it or not, the time when he might possibly have achieved something by marching to Vitepsk was now past; but in any case he could not have ventured on such a step after the severe losses which he had suffered.

On the ninth of November, while the 4th corps was struggling across the Vop, Napoleon in person arrived at Smolensk, which his advanced guard had already passed, not having been allowed even to enter the town. The disaster on the Vop he naturally did not hear of for some days; but another misfortune, less in itself, but even more ominous of evil, happened on the same day, and doubtless reached his ears by nightfall. Baraguay d'Hilliers' division at Smolensk had received orders, sent before Maloyaroslavetz, to move out towards Ielnia, so as to meet Napoleon, who expected to come by that road. These instructions were not countermanded till too late; and one of Baraguay d'Hilliers' brigades, 2,000 strong, had been surrounded by the enemy and compelled to surrender. The loss of 2,000 men, fairly fresh instead of being exhausted by the deadly march from Moscow, was no trifle in itself; but the fact which it established, that Kutusov was already in force south of Smolensk, was a worse blow. It meant that the enemy was again, as he had been at Tarutino, so posted as to command Napoleon's line of communication. Smolensk could no longer be thought of for a prolonged halt; the French tenure of it was really dependent on Kutusov's pleasure.

The worst news of all met Napoleon on his arrival at Smolensk. His northern wing with the addition of Victor's

corps was proving unable to cope with the Russians on the Dwina, and Vitepsk had already fallen into the enemy's hands. The retreat of the 2nd corps after being driven from Polotsk had been conducted very slowly, Wittgenstein being unable to press it, and on the twenty-ninth of October the 9th and 2nd corps met at Tchasniki; on the same day Wittgenstein and Steingell, who had so far been moving separately, effected their junction at Lepel and came up with Victor next day. Wittgenstein had left a garrison of 3,500 men at Polotsk, and had detached 5,000 down the Dwina to watch Macdonald. The latter after reconnoitring as far as Dünaburg left merely some cavalry to guard against a surprise from Macdonald, and took post facing Wrede, so that the latter could not move without uncovering Vilna. Wittgenstein's army was thus reduced to 31,000, whereas the two corps now with Victor amounted to 36,000, the 9th having 22,000, and the 2nd 14,000 men. Fully realising the expediency of pushing back Wittgenstein if possible, though as yet in total ignorance of the disasters impending over Napoleon's army, Victor determined on attacking, and accordingly sent to call in the two divisions, one of the 2nd corps and one of his own, which had been placed at Bechenkowiczi. By some misunderstanding only one came, and the cavalry of the 9th corps was also unaccountably far in rear. Being thus short of his full strength Victor hesitated about assuming the offensive, which he might probably have done with success, since he was stronger than the enemy in everything but cavalry. Wittgenstein on his side attacked, and drove over the little river Lukomlia that passes near Tchasniki such of the French as were on the northern bank, but failed to obtain possession of the bridge, which would have enabled him to

advance further. The action then subsided into a long cannonade in which the Russians, who could bring more guns to bear, had the advantage.

Victor had wasted an opportunity, and had had slightly the worst of a partial action; but he had not been defeated, and no sufficient reason can be given for his retreat next day. He was expected, it is true, to act as a general reserve, but he would be much more effective in that capacity if he could drive Wittgenstein beyond the Dwina than by merely remaining stationary opposite him. Wittgenstein on his side did not press his advantage, but remained in position on the Lukomlia. Whether this was due to knowledge that Victor was a little too strong for him, or was the result of the hampering instructions he received from head-quarters, it was certainly fortunate; for by the time Victor moved again the cold had seriously diminished his numbers. Victor had originally retired on Sienno, in a direct line towards Orsha; but for some unexplained reason he went south-westwards to Tchereia, which he reached on the sixth of November. On hearing of this, the Russian division which had been watching Victor's right attacked Vitepsk and occupied it on the seventh, destroying or capturing the garrison. Napoleon on receiving the news of Victor's retreat had written to him[1] a letter dated the seventh of November, which gives further proof how little he realised his desperate position. In it he ordered the marshal immediately to drive the enemy beyond the Dwina, and retake Polotsk. It is true that he adds in cipher that this is urgently necessary, his army being excessively fatigued; but even here he betrays no apprehension that Victor may be unequal to the task. Nor does he seem to have learned

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,326.

anything from the loss of Vitepsk. On the eleventh of November a long despatch was sent to Victor,[1] which betrays less apprehension of disaster than ever. Either Napoleon was shutting his eyes wilfully to the truth, or he was mad enough to wish to deceive the subordinate who held the most critical position of all. Victor is to attack at once: if Wittgenstein has chosen a position difficult to assail in front, it will be easy to manœuvre so as to cut his communications with the Dwina, which Victor may take for granted he cannot endure. The Emperor cannot doubt Victor's succeeding, and victory will have great results; it will enable the Emperor to take up winter quarters between Vitepsk, Orsha and Mohilew, and along the Dwina down to Polotsk. This would give us peace in the course of the winter, or certain success in the next campaign by menacing St. Petersburg. Any delay however will enable Wittgenstein to join Kutusov at Vitepsk, in which case they could not be dislodged without a general action, which is impossible; hence we should have to abandon part of Lithuania. The two main armies are too fatigued for a pitched battle; Victor's on the contrary and Wittgenstein's are bound to fight one before going into winter quarters, and the sooner the better.—It is obvious how dangerously all this misrepresents the true state of affairs. Manœuvring, which means concentration and therefore practically no shelter for the troops, would be as costly in lives as a battle, with the ground deep in snow. For Victor to attempt to cut Wittgenstein from the Dwina was to expose his own flank

[1] Printed in Chambray, ii. 421. The despatch is signed by Berthier, and was of course written from the Emperor's directions; but Nap. Corr. does not contain, as usual, the substance of this in the form of instructions to Berthier.

and rear to the Russians at Vitepsk. The French main army was it is true nearly worn out, but Kutusov's certainly was not, nor had Napoleon the slightest ground for assuming that it was. Of course too the suggestion of Kutusov meeting Wittgenstein at Vitepsk was grossly absurd, as was also the confident expectation expressed of taking up winter quarters between the Dwina and Dnieper.

One would be half inclined to suspect that this was a false despatch, which would mislead the Russians if intercepted, the real orders being intended to be conveyed by the messenger verbally, but for the fact that the measures[1] taken by Napoleon at Smolensk exhibit the same false estimate of the situation. The cavalry was very wisely reorganised into a single corps, under Latour-Maubourg, but there were not horses enough for half of what the order contemplated. The provisions stored at Smolensk were to be distributed, fifteen days' worth to the guard, six to the rest; but there was nothing like enough for this, and it proved impossible to make starving men wait for ordinary distribution. Some of the stores were pillaged, and therefore largely wasted. The 5th corps was ordered to go to Mohilew and there reorganise, the spare *cadres* to be sent to Warsaw to be filled up with recruits—a very sensible plan, if the whole of the country in rear had been securely in Napoleon's power. In a despatch sent to Maret urgently requiring more horses to be provided, it is said incidentally that there were depôts of harness, etc., available at Lepel, in spite of the fact that that place had been in the hands of the Russians for more than a fortnight. Dombrowski, whose troops were widely dispersed from Mohilew to Slutsk, and who had but 4,500 men in all,

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,328—36.

was told curtly that it was his business to defend Minsk in case of need. Before the order arrived it was already too late even to reach Minsk before Chichagov's advanced guard. Unless Napoleon was receiving totally false information about Chichagov and Schwarzenberg, of which there is no hint, he was astonishingly indifferent to what might be happening in that quarter. Apparently it was another illustration—he had given many before—of the saying that none are so blind as those who won't see. Given however the blindness to the danger of the Russian wings closing in to bar his retreat, there is nothing to find fault with in Napoleon's halt, such as it was, at Smolensk, which has been often blamed as grievous waste of time. And even in view of that danger it was a choice of evils. Ney was at such a distance that he could not reach Smolensk for some days, and Davout was near enough to sustain him in case of need, while Eugene's unfortunate *détour* to Dukhovchina placed him equally far off. To push forward was to continue this wide dispersion of the army, which exposed it to obvious danger of being overwhelmed in detail. To make a short halt was to give the leading portions some little rest. It is true that the delay enabled Kutusov, at his very leisurely pace, to place his troops in a position conveniently flanking the road from Smolensk westwards ; but Kutusov could, and perhaps would, have moved faster if Napoleon had not halted. The Emperor, who was skilful in grasping the character of his enemies, had very probably divined the truth that Kutusov, for whatever reason, would not attempt to drive him to extremities. It is true that every day gave the enemy an opportunity of redeeming his error ; but speedy advance would give him the chance, which suited his policy better, of irretrievably cutting off Davout and Ney.

The strange thing is that Napoleon, ignoring or facing the risk from delay to the extent of making some halt in Smolensk, should not have deemed it necessary to secure the advantage which might be reaped from it, of concentrating his army. The ordinary reason for marching with corps widely separated, convenience of shelter and subsistence, was not applicable, with snow on the ground and every town and village in ruins. Though the cavalry had almost ceased to exist, though the artillery horses were so reduced that very few guns could be used in action, for lack of strength to move them except on the high road, there was still a formidable body of veteran infantry. The French writers speak as if they could certainly have cut their way through any enemy trying to bar their passage—a pardonable exaggeration, though a gross one. The most splendid courage is helpless against overwhelming artillery backed by adequate infantry strength, as was exemplified several times on a small scale. But there would have been a chance for such tactics directed by Napoleon's consummate skill; and as a matter of fact Kutusov would never have put it to the proof. Napoleon however acted as if he were still master of the situation, as if the evils that were destroying his troops, cold, hunger, demoralisation, had no existence or were the fault of his lieutenants—as if all that was necessary was for the rear-guard to hold off the Russians while the rest marched at the rate which seemed to him convenient.

Thus when the fresh move from Smolensk was made, the army was allowed to extend again over fifty or sixty miles. On the thirteenth of November Davout was close to Smolensk on the main road, and Eugene was approaching from the north. In another day the whole might have been

concentrated, and marched either in parallel columns by different routes, or as close together as they could be kept, if he would not send any part off the high road. Instead of this Napoleon on the thirteenth pushed forward Junot and the Poles, already a little way out of Smolensk. He did not even take the road along the right bank of the Dnieper, which would have lengthened the distance but slightly, and would at any rate have put the river between him and Kutusov. He simply directed the whole army along the high road towards Orsha, as if Kutusov were not worth a thought. The reserve artillery, such as was left of it, followed Junot; and then came a division of the guard escorting the treasure and the head-quarters' baggage. On the fourteenth Napoleon himself left with the guard, ordering Eugene to follow next day. Davout and Ney received instructions[1] to stay in Smolensk while everything was cleared out, to prepare it for destruction, and to leave on the sixteenth, Ney on the seventeenth if all was not ready. Napoleon still failed to see that to attempt to carry off sick and wounded was to deprive them of their last chance of life, and that carefully to sweep together all stragglers was merely adding to the embarrassments of the army.

Kutusov's proceedings meanwhile were of the most leisurely description. He contented himself with watching the French from his position a little to the southwards, and did not move until it was too late to intercept Napoleon at Krasnoe, just half-way to Orsha, and the most convenient point for the purpose. Whatever his motive, he adhered firmly to his resolution of not fighting on a great scale, regardless of the fact that his own army was necessarily

[1] Printed in Chambray, ii. 428, *sq.*, as sent by Berthier. Napoleon's note for Berthier is not in Nap. Corr., and doubtless perished later.

perishing, though at a less rate than the French, from continued bivouacking in the cold. Miloradovich as before moved between Kutusov's line of march and the great road, a little in advance, but was carefully prevented from doing too much. A small body of light cavalry however was allowed to push forward and occupy Krasnoe, as if it had been intended to warn Napoleon of what his enemy could do.

The head of the French army reached Krasnoe on the fourteenth, the Russian cavalry retiring when infantry came up, after doing some damage to the stores, which had been collected there in no great quantity, but of importance to the French in their destitute condition. Napoleon himself arrived on the fifteenth by Kutusov's permission; for Miloradovich was so posted as to cannonade the guard as they passed, but was not allowed to bar the way, or do more than pick up stragglers and abandoned guns. If allowed a free hand he might perhaps have captured the Emperor himself; certainly he could have cut up the guard badly. On the sixteenth Napoleon waited at Krasnoe for Eugene, who on the previous day had only been able to cover about a third of the distance from Smolensk. About two o'clock on that day, the main Russian army was within a mile or two of Krasnoe. Every one urged Kutusov to attack at once, which he could have done with certainty of decisive success. One story is that he was going to do so, but finally refused on hearing from a Krasnoe peasant that the place was occupied by troops in bearskin caps; but it was really obstinacy, not fear, that deterred him. Miloradovich meanwhile had been allowed to occupy the Smolensk road some few miles out, so that when Eugene's corps approached about 3 p.m. he found the way barred. Forming his troops into three columns he attacked the enemy vigorously,

the only course unless he was prepared to lay down his arms. Very inferior in strength and almost without guns, he was of course decisively repulsed, and retreated a little distance towards Smolensk. Night was approaching, but there was still time for Eugene's force to be destroyed, if it would not surrender. The Russians however made no counter-attack; according to Eugene of Wurtemberg, the commander-in-chief forbade any forward movement. Eugene took advantage of this respite to escape. Waiting till it was quite dark, he made a circuit over the open country to the north of the road, and reached Krasnoe before morning with only 3,500 men left, his corps having arrived at Smolensk nearly 6,000 strong.

On the seventeenth Napoleon seems to have awakened, for the first time during the retreat, to the thought that it became him to take a share with his own special troops in the labours which had nearly destroyed the rest of the army. Why he did nothing during the afternoon of the sixteenth to help Eugene does not appear. A very moderate demonstration on Miloradovich's rear would have caused Kutusov to order him to withdraw from the high road. He is praised by some writers for his courage, in showing a bold front against heavy odds, and for his judgment in reckoning on Kutusov's inaction. The two things are not quite consistent, nor indeed had he any choice. To have continued his retreat before Davout came up was to doom the 1st corps to destruction, to say nothing of the 3rd, which was still further behind; and without them his army was too small for any encounter. When he had made up his mind, however, his dispositions were made with excellent judgment, utilising to the utmost the troops at his command. He had very little more than the guard

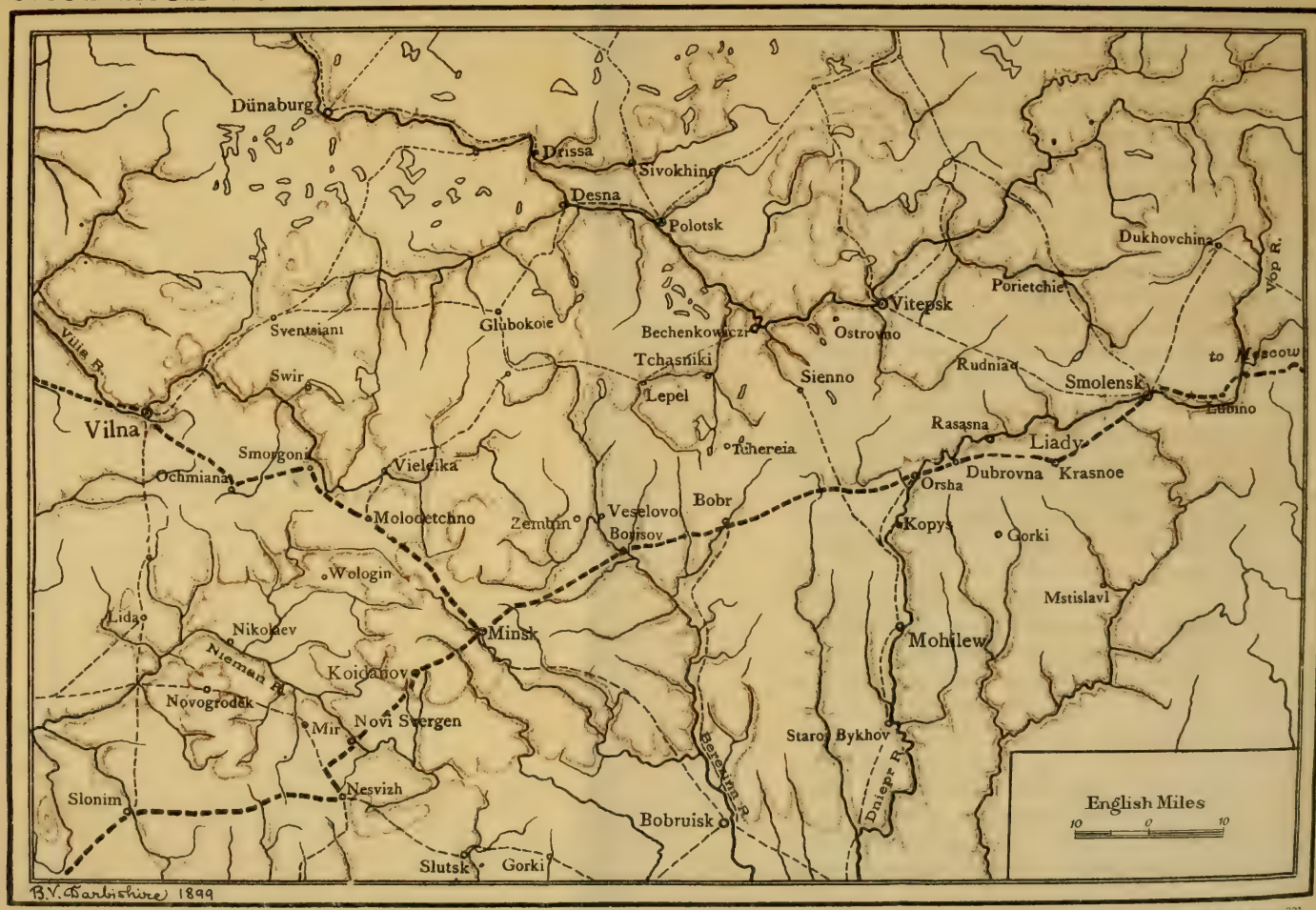
wherewith to form line of battle south of Krasnoe, for he had ordered Eugene to move off towards Orsha. Thirteen thousand infantry, 2,200 cavalry, and very few guns, were but a handful to have left out of a corps which had crossed the Niemen over 47,000 strong, had never gone into action all through the campaign, and had been given the lion's share of food and shelter during the retreat. They were not however put to a very severe proof at Krasnoe, for Kutusov also had formed his plans on the previous evening.

According to the somewhat lame account given by Buturlin, who makes out the best case he can for Kutusov throughout, three corps under Tormazov were to move to the left, preceded by some cavalry, and close the Orsha road: one corps under Galitzin was to attack Krasnoe directly, by way of a demonstration; while Miloradovich with the other two corps was to take up a position south of the Smolensk road, let Davout pass with a little cannonading, and then hold that road against Ney. Kutusov however, finding that but a few French troops had started for Orsha, kept Tormazov back lest he should find himself engaged with the bulk of Napoleon's army. In other words, having been persuaded to act vigorously, he formed an incoherent plan, there being no conceivable reason why Miloradovich should not have fought Davout as he came up, and then backed out of executing the vigorous part of it. Thus the fighting close to Krasnoe had no definite object; Napoleon's action, most reasonably undertaken in order to call off the attention of the Russians, so that they should not stop Davout, was rendered needless by Kutusov's own orders. Galitzin's attack on Krasnoe had no motive, when Tormazov was not marching towards the Orsha road. There was severe fighting at one or two

points, rather to the advantage of the French, who were stronger than Galitzin alone, while Kutusov refused to reinforce him. Davout's column was allowed to pass into Krasnoe, the leading division coming up into line with the guard. Then Napoleon began his retreat on Orsha, which was only harassed by hostile cavalry, for Tormazov had been held back so long that he had not time to reach the Orsha road. Davout's last division however, which closed the march, was badly cut up.

Thus what ought to have been the final battle of the campaign ended in a discreditable fiasco. The nominal losses of the French were very great, but as these consisted largely in prisoners, who were chiefly the disbanded mob, their fighting strength was not very seriously reduced, except in Eugene's corps. Thanks to Kutusov's supineness, Napoleon was able partially to redeem his previous error, and get his army better into hand, except that he was obliged to abandon Ney to his fate. To describe the fighting at Krasnoe either as glorious to the French arms, or as very disastrous to them, is preposterous. It might have been either, or possibly both, if Kutusov had chosen. As it was, it hardly deserves the name of a battle.

One incidental result of the events at Krasnoe, however, was the most brilliant thing in the whole campaign. Ney's corps had been made up at Smolensk to over 6,000 men, partly from the garrison, partly by fresh drafts recently arrived from France; this total includes a division transferred from the 1st corps. He was encumbered also, thanks to Napoleon's injudicious order that he should clear all possible stragglers, etc., out of Smolensk, with some 7,000 non-combatants. His instructions allowed him till the morning of the seventeenth to prepare for destroying



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the walls of Smolensk, and he took his full time. There is some conflict of evidence as to Ney's having been left without information. It is certain that a quarrel broke out between Ney and Davout, in consequence of Ney's troops on reaching Smolensk finding no food, which was attributed to the soldiers of Davout's corps having plundered the remaining stores. It is certain also that Davout was afterwards accused of having deserted Ney on the march to Krasnoe. This accusation was so far unfounded that it was done by Napoleon's order, and that the Emperor felt himself compelled to choose between risking the whole and sacrificing a part, and very reluctantly chose the latter. Davout was of course bound to obey, and was also bound to give Ney as full information as possible. There is no evidence that he did not attempt this: seeing how the Cossacks infested the whole line of march, his messengers may well have failed to arrive. Ney however did not know much, if anything, of what was going on in front. Fezensac, who was with him, says that no news whatever reached him on the fifteenth, sixteenth or seventeenth. Chambray, who says that he heard from Davout late on the sixteenth that Eugene had met with disaster and that he himself must therefore hasten his march, adds Ney's remark that all the Cossacks in Russia should not prevent him from fulfilling his instructions, which implies that Ney had no idea of the whole Russian army being in a position to cut him off.

Before daylight on the seventeenth of November Ney quitted Smolensk, blowing up the ancient walls and other buildings according to orders. This was an entirely useless piece of vandalism, as the walls were of little value as fortifications; but it had the effect of putting out of their

misery some of the sick and wounded, who were left behind —to the number of 5,000 according to Chambray—with no kind of provision for tending them. That day's march was not seriously impeded by the enemy, but on the afternoon of the eighteenth, when not many miles from Krasnoe, they came suddenly on Miloradovich's troops in position across the road. The day was foggy; in fact a thaw was beginning, which considerably relieved the French army generally, but added in one important respect, as will be seen, to Ney's troubles. Unable to discern clearly the numbers of the enemy, Ney attacked without hesitation; probably he would have done the same under any conditions, as thinking audacity his best policy. The combat only lasted a quarter of an hour, and the French were of course repulsed with great loss. Again, as two days before, the Russians were prevented by the approach of night from following up their success, but took a large number of prisoners, mostly stragglers. Ney however was in far worse case than Eugene had been: the nearest portion of the army, instead of being in Krasnoe, was about two days' march distant. He did not positively know this, but his military instinct dictated to him, as the only feasible course, a very wide *détour* which should put the Dnieper between him and the enemy. Miloradovich more than once sent an officer to summon Ney to surrender, but the marshal would not listen for a moment, and even made the last messenger prisoner on the plea that he was really come to spy out their position and numbers. When it was quite dark, he left the bivouac fires burning and moved quietly away northwards. The night was cloudy, the map imperfect, and it was with difficulty that the French could keep their direction. At one spot, says Fezensac,

Ney caused the ice on a rivulet to be broken, in order to ascertain in which direction it flowed. The Dnieper was nowhere fordable, and the doubt was whether the cold had lasted long enough to freeze it, especially as a thaw had begun. Fortune so far favoured Ney's bold venture that a place was found where the river could be crossed. The ice however broke at the edges, and it proved impossible to get any gun or vehicle across, or more than the few horses which had first tried. The soldiers were most of them drenched in the chilly water, but the deadly cold had ceased for the time, and they were at any rate safe from being suddenly taken in flank, so long as they kept the Dnieper near them on the left. Soon after daybreak they surprised a party of Cossacks, and so obtained a few more horses for reconnoitring purposes. But this told them that Platov was on the right bank also, so that they could not hope to rest undisturbed. Before long the Cossacks were upon them in considerable force, their light guns drawn on sledges. With such adversaries it was impossible to come to close quarters; they could only suffer till woods afforded some shelter. The soldiers began to lose heart, and think that it was time to surrender and end their misery, but Ney's indomitable energy prevailed even over this. Partly cheered by his confidence, partly shamed, they struggled on, and presently came to a ravine which cost them their last horses, but which for that very reason relieved them for a while from the Cossacks. By nightfall on the twentieth they were opposite Rasasna. After some hours of rest they pushed forwards again, and ultimately reached the Orsha-Vitepsk road at midnight on the twenty-first. Here they encountered the head of a force which Eugene had led out of Orsha to meet them, on

hearing their plight from one of Ney's officers who had managed to go on in advance. Their adventurous march was achieved, and they were for the moment in safety; but only 900 men out of the whole body that Ney led out of Smolensk had followed him to the end.

Napoleon was guilty of the gross injustice of blaming Davout for abandoning Ney. Notoriously he always laid the blame for everything that went wrong on some one; he usually behaved as if it were inconceivable either that he himself could be guilty of error or omission, or that the enemy might be so strong as to overpower any of his lieutenants without their fault. In this particular instance he was doubly unjust: not only had Davout acted under the Emperor's immediate orders when he evacuated Krasnoe, instead of holding on there until Ney should arrive, but Napoleon's resolution to leave Ney to his fate was under the circumstances reasonable, even necessary. It was an extreme case no doubt, but still an instance of an ordinary incident of war, a part of an army being sacrificed in order to save the whole. If Napoleon ever cared for any human being save himself, he was attached to Ney; and this may be thought to furnish some excuse for his thus giving vent to his extreme regret that Ney should have been left to apparently inevitable destruction.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CLOSING OF THE TRAP.

The days during which the Moscow army was moving from Krasnoe to the Berezina were, materially, a period of considerable relief. The cold had for the time disappeared; the enemy ceased to press, and at Orsha there were stores of food, as well as of munitions of war, sufficient to make a sensible difference in the situation. Nevertheless, says Chambray, who was himself present, demoralisation made rapid progress. The thing most urgently needed was rest, and that unfortunately was the one thing unattainable. Rather, was it expedient to take advantage of the less rigorous temperature, of the possession of a small supply of food, above all of the relaxation of pursuit, to push forward as far as possible. The cold was sure to return soon, more severe than ever; the food would not last long; Kutusov might at any time renew his pressure. As a matter of fact he did not do so: it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that from Krasnoe he gave up the pursuit. He followed up Napoleon's retreat with cavalry, but in a very perfunctory fashion: he did not even let cavalry go forward and destroy the bridge at Orsha,[1] which would have delayed Napoleon appreciably

[1] The town is on the right bank of the Dnieper, here 400 yards wide, and high above the left bank. If a Russian force large enough to overpower the very small garrison had seized Orsha and broken the bridge, Napoleon would have had almost as great difficulty in crossing as at the Berezina later.

without any cost to the Russians. The bulk of his army he moved forward so leisurely that he was soon entirely distanced. Kutusov's conduct is defended on the plea that his army also was suffering from the hardships they were undergoing. This is of course true, though they suffered far less than their enemies, being better supplied. But it furnishes all the greater reason for condemning his previous remissness. If Kutusov had done all in his power at Viasma, or at Krasnoe, his troops need not have made another effort. War must cost lives, but the shorter it is the cheaper. Kutusov's army lost many thousands more men by the course actually pursued than would have fallen in a pitched battle at Viasma.

Napoleon may possibly by this time have convinced himself that he had not very much to fear from Kutusov, provided he pushed steadily forwards. The real danger lay, though he was as yet far from realising its seriousness, in the other Russian armies. Chichagov and Wittgenstein were not far from meeting across the line of further retreat. On the south there was practically no force to bar Chichagov's advance, and in the north Wittgenstein was a match for the 2nd and 9th corps, on which depended the sole hope of escape for the fugitives from Moscow.

Chichagov's proceedings must be judged in the light of the instructions given to him, and of the information afforded to him respecting the enemy. It has been seen that he received from Kutusov a series of orders and counter-orders, as well as the Tzar's elaborate plan for exact co-operation with Wittgenstein, all of which were equally incapable of execution. He was acting on the general spirit of the Tzar's plan when he decided to move on Minsk; but he had allowed his army a longer

rest at Brest-Litovsk than was justifiable without actual necessity, of which there is no evidence. One unfavourable result of this delay was the large increase in Schwarzenberg's army. Some reinforcements reached the Austrians, and a whole division (Durutte) from the 11th corps joined Reynier, thus bringing the total of the force, which Sacken was to contain while his chief marched on Minsk, up to 45,000 men or more. It is not probable that Chichagov could have known these troops to be on their way, but he might reasonably have calculated on the possibility of it. The consequences of this were twofold: he had to leave a larger force with Sacken, and his own march was to a certain extent hampered by the risk that the Austrians might take him in rear.

Chichagov began to move on the twenty-ninth of October, and marched slowly to Slonim. According to his own report to the Tzar,[1] he thought that Schwarzenberg would possibly in this way be tempted to fight, and he wished to be within reach. This expectation was in a sense verified, for Schwarzenberg just afterwards crossed the Bug at Drohiczyn and marched on Wolkowisk, as if intending to follow Chichagov, while he left Reynier to face Sacken. The latter, thinking that Schwarzenberg was trying to turn his right, moved northwards, but in spite of having the inner line was not able to anticipate him. As his only chance of an effective blow which should call back Schwarzenberg, Sacken turned upon Reynier, who was decidedly inferior to himself in force. On the night of the fourteenth of November he surprised Reynier, who was by this time at Wolkowisk, Schwarzenberg being at Slonim. The attack succeeded for the moment, but

[1] Dated on the seventh of November. Russ. State Papers, vi.

the Russians in the morning were driven out of the town again. Sacken did not venture to renew the contest, because Schwarzenberg from Slonim threatened to take him in rear. On receiving information, which proved false, that Schwarzenberg after all was not approaching, he assailed Reynier again, and narrowly escaped destruction, thanks to being able to take refuge in a great forest. He was driven beyond Brest-Litovsk, which was re-entered by Reynier on the twenty-sixth; but he had none the less occupied the attention of both Reynier and Schwarzenberg, not far short of double his own force, during the critical fortnight on the Berezina. Chichagov might well tell the Tzar that Sacken had done his task to his satisfaction.

Some French writers are loud in their denunciation of Schwarzenberg's treachery: he wilfully avoided, they say, doing his best for Napoleon's cause. It is reasonable to argue that, had he been merely one of Napoleon's marshals, and had he possessed even an imperfect knowledge of the straits to which the Moscow army was reduced, he ought to have followed Chichagov and endeavoured to prevent his reaching the Berezina, or to threaten him with destruction by being enclosed between himself and Napoleon. The price to be paid might have been heavy—the probable overthrow of Reynier by Sacken and the consequent exposure of Warsaw to Russian occupation. And the prospect of success for himself was not great, seeing that Chichagov had in fact equal strength and might easily have had half as much again. Still this was the only way in which he could act effectively, and it is easy to see now that the risk was well worth running. Schwarzenberg however had no means of knowing that

Napoleon was in imminent danger. The Emperor's persistent concealment of the truth from Maret, his medium of communication with every one outside his own immediate army, whether it was deliberate or due to self-deception, worked disastrously for him in this connection. Schwarzenberg had had a definite task assigned to him, that of covering the Grand Duchy of Warsaw: he needed very strong justification for ignoring this duty; and such justification, though it in fact existed, was unknown to him. Moreover he was not a French marshal, but the commander of the Austrian auxiliary corps. As such he was bound by the orders of his own government, which was pledged to Russia as well as to Napoleon. Whatever his own sentiments, he was perfectly aware, as his despatches[1] private and public to Metternich show, that the feeling in his army was largely hostile to the undertaking they were engaged in. Under all these conditions it is not surprising that a man of Schwarzenberg's cautious disposition should have chosen the safe course, and preserved his corps from serious loss, though at the same time it is natural that the French, seeing how much he might have saved them by acting differently, should be blind to the considerations which justified him.

Napoleon had of course not left the whole country between Schwarzenberg and the main Moscow road entirely unprotected. There was a garrison in Minsk under a Polish general Bronikowski, but it consisted mainly of new Lithuanian levies worth very little in the field. He had also detached from the Polish corps Dombrowski's division, and left it to hold Mohilew and the neighbouring region, there being all through the summer a Russian post at Bobruisk.

[1] V. A. K. A. F. 223.

Dombrowski, on hearing that the Austrian detachments at Pinsk and elsewhere had been drawn in when Chichagov appeared on the Styr, had spread his troops out with the purpose of observing what was going on. He had only 4,500 men, a force entirely inadequate for seriously checking Chichagov, but he could not even concentrate his attention on this task. There was a Russian force under Ertel at Mozyr, some way to the southwards, which might at any moment advance on Mohilew. The strength of this force is variously represented: the official number was 14,000, but Chambray makes it as low as 9,000. However it never came into effective action, and therefore its real strength is unimportant. Chichagov on starting himself for Minsk very properly sent orders to Ertel to do the same, but Ertel for some flimsy reason remained inactive at Mozyr. On finding this out Chichagov promptly superseded him, but it was by that time too late for Ertel's division to assist in the operations on the Berezina.

If Dombrowski could have guessed that Ertel would do nothing, he might have had a chance. Though Minsk was not fortified, there was time to construct field-works sufficient to enable 8,000 men, Dombrowski's division with the garrison, to defend that all-important place for some time. To have done so, however, would have been taking on himself the responsibility of ignoring his instructions, a course which hardly any officer of Napoleon ever dared to follow so long as it was possible to obey. He did his best to watch the enemy by spreading his troops out in detachments all the way from Mohilew to Slutsk, considerably over 100 miles, with the necessary drawback that he could not concentrate under several days, but dared not do more on his own responsibility. He doubtless knew that Victor's

corps was intended to act as a general reserve, in whatever direction it was wanted; and he certainly had no means of knowing the state to which the Moscow army was reduced. No general in Dombrowski's subordinate position could have been expected to do otherwise than act on the orders of a master so jealous of his authority. The result was that Minsk could not be really defended.

Chichagov left Slonim on the eighth of November, leaving a small detachment to guard his rear; he had evidently made up his mind that there was no real risk of Schwarzenberg pressing him. At the same time he sent off Chernishev, the Tzar's aide-de-camp, with a strong escort of Cossacks, to make his way to Wittgenstein, explain his plans, and beg that general to join him on the Berezina. This mission Chernishev successfully discharged, though not without a sharp encounter with a body of French cavalry, whose march from the neighbourhood of Vilna to the Berezina happened to prove of great importance to Napoleon's passage of that river. On the twelfth Chichagov reached Nesvizh, and on the next day his advanced guard under Lambert defeated part of the Minsk garrison which attempted to defend the bridge over the Niemen at Novi Svergen. The governor of Minsk did not suppose the enemy to be in any strength, for the same troops stood to fight again at Koidanow, very near Minsk, and were completely destroyed or captured by Lambert on the fifteenth. Having thus lost the major part of his small force, and finding that Dombrowski could not possibly come to his assistance, Bronikowski had no choice but to abandon Minsk, which was occupied by the Russians on the sixteenth. The town contained immense stores, which were naturally of great use to the Russians, though the gain to them was

infinitely less important than the loss to the French. The hospitals, which contained thousands of sick and wounded, were in a frightful state—a deep disgrace to the officers directly responsible, and a striking testimony to the inefficiency of all administration in rear of Napoleon's army: for if the sick could not be properly cared for at Minsk, a considerable town on the main line of communication and full of stores, what was to be expected in places less favourably situated? Dombrowski and the relics of the Minsk garrison retired in all haste to Borisov, where they might hope to hold the *tête du pont* over the Berezina, whither Chichagov followed them, after waiting a day in Minsk to get his horses rough-shod. Lambert again went in advance, and came before Borisov on the twentieth, a detachment being at the same time sent to Zembin higher up the Berezina. The next day he assaulted the *tête du pont*, which was obstinately defended by Dombrowski. The Russians at last managed to place a battery in such a position as to enfilade the works, and soon afterwards a regiment of chasseurs succeeded in turning the right flank of the defences where they abutted on the river. Dombrowski was consequently obliged to retire hastily, and the Russians pressed on so vigorously that they crossed the river with the flying enemy, and prevented their injuring the bridge. Before evening the remains of Dombrowski's force had been driven from Borisov, which is on the left bank of the Berezina: Chichagov had come up and established his head-quarters in Borisov; and an advanced guard had been sent forward under Count Pahlen, Lambert having been badly wounded in the action, which bivouacked that night a few miles out on the Orsha road.

Down to this time Chichagov was in entire ignorance of

the true state of affairs, having received no intelligence of the main armies since the evacuation of Moscow. According to the Count de Rochechouart, a French emigrant noble who was on Chichagov's staff, he himself found, among some half-burned papers in the house which Bronikowski had occupied, a despatch from Victor,[1] written apparently in ignorance of the capture of Minsk, to the effect that Napoleon might be expected to reach Borisov on the twenty-third and Minsk on the twenty-fifth. If this be correct it may be imagined that Chichagov and his officers were considerably surprised and excited at the thought that they would have the Grand Army, in unknown strength, on their hands so soon. Chichagov very wisely did nothing, except send the advanced guard somewhat further forward; the bulk of his troops remained on the left bank of the river in and around the *tête du pont.*

Late on the twenty-third, when the admiral and his staff were sitting down to dinner, they were startled by some fugitive cavalry riding into the town crying out that the French were upon them. The foremost detachment of Pahlen's force had encountered the head of Oudinot's corps in full march for Borisov, had been seized with a panic on being charged by the French, and had communicated their fright to the main body, which fled in all directions. Little more than a tenth of Pahlen's force could be assembled that night, though many more rejoined the colours in a day or two, having crossed the river below Borisov. The head-quarters' staff seems to have been more or less infected by the same panic, for Borisov was abandoned in headlong

[1] This despatch is given in full in Rochechouart's Memoirs, p. 186, so that there seems no reason for doubting the correctness of the statement.

haste. The long bridge over the Berezina was crowded with fugitives impeding one another; the supplies of all kinds which had been brought over for the use of the head-quarters and such troops as accompanied it were left behind, to the great advantage of Oudinot's cavalry, who were presently able to fit themselves out anew. A little more coolness might have saved all this loss, for the French were not close at hand, except a few cavalry. There can however be no doubt that the abandonment of Borisov was necessary: the panic rout of the advanced guard merely caused it to be done hastily instead of deliberately. The Russians, when they had broken the bridge, which was done without difficulty, were in an unassailable position; and seeing how complete was their ignorance of the strength of the enemy approaching, no general could have been expected to try a more venturesome course.

Even before the fall of Minsk, Victor had made his final attempt to drive back Wittgenstein and failed. After his first encounter with Wittgenstein in the last days of October he had retreated to Tchereia. There Oudinot resumed the command of the 2nd corps, which had temporarily been in the hands of a general of division, St. Cyr having been badly wounded at Polotsk. Marbot, who was in the 2nd corps, does not hesitate to say that the marshals could not agree, and that Oudinot moved his troops a little distance away from Victor in order to be independent. Marbot's statements are however to be received with great reserve: as a matter of fact they acted in concert. Napoleon had not definitely placed one of them over the other, as he might with advantage have done. Even in his despatch of the eleventh of November already quoted he bade Victor concert with Oudinot

measures for driving back Wittgenstein. This however only came to hand at the last moment; the previous despatch of the seventh of November was that which reached Victor at Tchereia, and caused him to resume the offensive on the thirteenth of November. By this time the snow had been on the ground for a week, and the 9th and 2nd corps had suffered seriously from the cold. According to Chambray their numbers had dwindled by the thirteenth to 25,000. The prospect of defeating a somewhat superior enemy in a strong position was not very hopeful, and the marshals wisely resolved to try the other alternative sanctioned by the Emperor, of turning Wittgenstein's left, with the view of forcing him to retreat in order not to be cut off from the Dwina. According to one account Victor was for fighting, Oudinot for manœuvring, and the latter prevailed. However this may have been, neither plan could have succeeded. Wittgenstein still retained the position from which the French had already recoiled, and if directly attacked must in all probability have inflicted on them a disastrous repulse. Nor would he move when on the fourteenth they advanced in a direction for turning his flank. Under these circumstances Victor had no option but to retreat again. His army was practically the sole resource left to Napoleon, and though he did not yet know the full extent of the disasters to the Moscow army—indeed the last blow at Krasnoe had not yet fallen—he knew that his force was the only reserve within reach. Accordingly he went back to his old position at Tchereia, where he was within one long march of the main road on which everything depended, and might hope to keep Wittgenstein from reaching it. Wittgenstein seemingly lost a valuable opportunity: if he had pressed

vigorously forward with his right when Victor was moving to turn his left, he might have forced the marshal to retreat eastwards. The main road west of Orsha would then have had no protection on the north, and Wittgenstein would have been in a position to strike the Moscow army in flank. At this time however he probably knew nothing definite of Napoleon's situation, and he certainly did not yet know Chichagov's position and intentions. He had therefore no obvious reason for following up Victor, at the cost of abandoning a position which had twice proved virtually unassailable, and which was well situated for awaiting the development of events.

Napoleon in person reached Dubrovna, about two-thirds of the way from Krasnoe to Orsha, early on the morning of the eighteenth of November, his advanced guard being already at Orsha. Here he was met by the tidings that the Russians had seized Minsk, and probably also that Victor and Oudinot had fallen back. He immediately ordered Dombrowski to collect his troops and hold Borisov, orders which Dombrowski, as was natural, had already anticipated. At the same time he told Oudinot to march at once to Borisov, unite with his own men those of Dombrowski and the survivors of the Minsk garrison, and retake Minsk. As Oudinot would even so have only about 13,000 men, he had not much chance of driving back Chichagov, who had about double. As a matter of fact, as has been already seen, it was far too late. All that Oudinot could achieve was to expel the Russians from Borisov, and hold the place until some plan could be devised for crossing the Berezina. Victor was at the same time told to mask Oudinot's movement, placing himself so as to be nearer to Vilna, Borisov and Orsha than the enemy, and to give

Wittgenstein the impression that Napoleon was going to march against him. Victor however was not required to find the answer to this puzzle, which a glance at the map will show to have been impossible; for the next day Napoleon drew him also towards Borisov. Apparently he at length was beginning to realise that the net was close round him, and that he need concentrate every available man in order to have strength to break through it.

During the march of the nineteenth Napoleon halted the old guard, and made them a little speech. "Grenadiers de ma garde, vous êtes témoins de la désorganisation de l'armée: la plupart des soldats, par une fatalité déplorable, ont jeté leurs armes. Si vous imitiez ce funeste exemple, tout espoir serait perdu. Le salut de l'armée vous est confié: vous justifierez la bonne opinion que j'ai de vous. Il faut non seulement que les officiers maintiennent une discipline sévère, mais que les soldats exercent entre eux une rigoureuse surveillance, et punissent eux-mêmes ceux qui s'écarteraient de leurs rangs." Such language was not calculated to rouse much enthusiasm, nor was there much occasion for using it. The guard had naturally maintained the best discipline: besides being all veterans, they had had a very large share of the supplies available on the retreat, so that they had suffered infinitely less than the rest, and had therefore less excuse for deserting the ranks. The appeal should have been made, in a more sympathetic tone and at an earlier date, to the men of the less favoured corps who had done all the fighting and borne all the hardships. It might have prevented some at least from yielding to the temptation of abandoning their duty before cold and fatigue and starvation had rendered them absolutely incapable of doing it. In one respect the

spirit of the whole army was remarkable. Sir Robert Wilson declares that none of the prisoners, not even those who were glad to be captured in the hope of seeing the end of their sufferings, blamed the Emperor: it was fate, or bad luck, never his fault. Men in such a frame of mind would have responded to an appeal from Napoleon personally; he injured his own interests materially by shutting himself up among his guard, and taking no personal care for the rest of the army.

Arriving at Orsha on the nineteenth of November, Napoleon made a serious attempt to restore order. The place contained considerable magazines, so that it was possible to distribute both food and ammunition. There were also plenty of guns, more in fact than could be horsed. Six batteries were formed, properly equipped, and given to the corps which had lost all or nearly all their artillery. The disbanded soldiers were ordered, under severe penalties, to rejoin the corps to which they belonged in localities carefully designated, and it would seem that there were spare muskets in Orsha to re-arm them. How much effect these orders produced it would be difficult to calculate: the number of stragglers was so great that it was impossible to compel obedience, and the demoralisation had lasted too long. Still something was achieved, and at any rate what was left of the fighting army was refreshed for another effort. Napoleon, it may be observed, wisely did not reorganise his troops. The various corps still retained their official existence, though the 3rd, 5th and 8th had shrunk to less than the numbers of a full battalion, and the 1st and 4th were little better off. It is suggested that this may have been meant to deceive the enemy, who if they heard of orders issued to a given corps would assume that

it really existed; but the obvious advantage of retaining arrangements to which the soldiers were used was a perfectly adequate reason. The Russians were certainly to some extent deceived, and over-estimated the fighting strength of the French; but this was because the total number was still great, and they could not accurately determine what proportion of the whole mass was efficient.

More effective were the orders given for the destruction of vehicles and baggage, and for the transfer of the horses thus set free to the service of the artillery. In the less exhausted region west of Smolensk a fair number of country ponies had been procured, which though less strong were probably hardier and more serviceable than larger horses. Severe penalties were denounced against any infringement of these orders, which limited even generals to one vehicle, and strictly forbade the soldiers to drive a horse or vehicle of any kind. As however common humanity prevented depriving the remnant of the non-combatant fugitives from Moscow of their all, and there were wounded to be transported, these orders also were very imperfectly fulfilled. The mass of encumbrances which crowded the bridges of the Berezina a week later, and which gave occasion for most of the horrors of the passage, is sufficient evidence that Napoleon's commands were only very partially effective. The Emperor even burned his own papers, and the pontoon train shared the same fate, in spite of the urgent remonstrances of General Eblé, who commanded it. Eblé however managed to save two portable forges, two loads of charcoal, and several waggons containing tools and other appliances, without which the Berezina could never have been bridged. The delay occasioned by the lack of pontoons might well have been far more important than in fact it was, for

Kutusov did not come up, as he might easily have done, to make the Russian strength overwhelming, and the other armies were on the spot all through. Nevertheless the want of them diminished by thousands the number of those who survived the passage.

When Napoleon gave the order for burning the bridge train Borisov had not been actually seized by the Russians, so that the full extent of the difficulty was not yet staring him in the face. He however knew that the enemy had been four days in possession of Minsk, only forty-two miles further off, and might therefore easily be that day at Borisov. Still he would not bring himself to believe the danger serious. His despatch[1] to Victor on the twentieth contemplates Oudinot's reaching Borisov on the twenty-fourth, and bids Victor arrange so as to arrive there on the twenty-sixth, and form the rear-guard of the army which will move on Minsk. Now seeing that the order for Oudinot to march on Borisov was despatched on the early morning of the eighteenth, that the aide-de-camp who carried it had less than fifty miles to go, and that Oudinot was stationed about the same distance from Borisov, it cannot be said that Napoleon regarded any great haste as essential, though the marshal, perhaps better realising the situation, did in fact arrive on the twenty-third. The assumption that the army will march on Minsk implies a similar undervaluing of Chichagov's power to check his course. According to Chambray[2] Napoleon supposed Chichagov to have only 12,000 men, mostly new levies.

[1] Berthier's despatch is printed in Chambray, ii. 460. Napoleon's original was doubtless destroyed with other papers, as there is no trace of it in Nap. Corr.

[2] Chambray, iii. 27. He does not quote any authority for this statement, but he was himself in the army.

Had this been the case, Oudinot's corps with the Poles might reasonably be expected to get the better of him; but there is nothing to show that Napoleon had any basis for this notion beyond his own wish to believe it true.

Napoleon heard from Oudinot on the twenty-second that the Russians had seized Borisov, and that he himself was marching to attack them and try to drive them out. The Emperor immediately replied in a letter in which, as was too often the case, he directed the marshal to perform impossibilities. If the enemy succeed in destroying the bridge at Borisov, you must seize a point of passage to right or left, construct two bridges and redoubts to protect them; the river is fordable and only ten or twelve yards wide near Zembin (fifteen miles above Borisov), and also at Berezino (forty miles below); this must be done to-morrow, for I must know at latest the day after, since if we are to cross at Berezino we must leave the high road at Bobr.—How Oudinot is to do all this in a single day, how he is to construct bridges in a moment without a pontoon train, how even a reconnoitring party could reach Berezino in the time, Napoleon does not condescend to consider. This letter must have been despatched on the spur of the moment, for in a few hours Napoleon had obtained proper information about the topography, and sent Oudinot instructions of a different tenour.

According to Thiers[1] the information was derived from General Dode, an engineer officer attached to the 2nd corps, who was personally acquainted with the course of the Berezina. He explained that it would be simply impossible to force a passage at Borisov if the bridge was destroyed,

[1] Thiers says that his account is based upon information supplied by General Dode himself, a good many years afterwards.

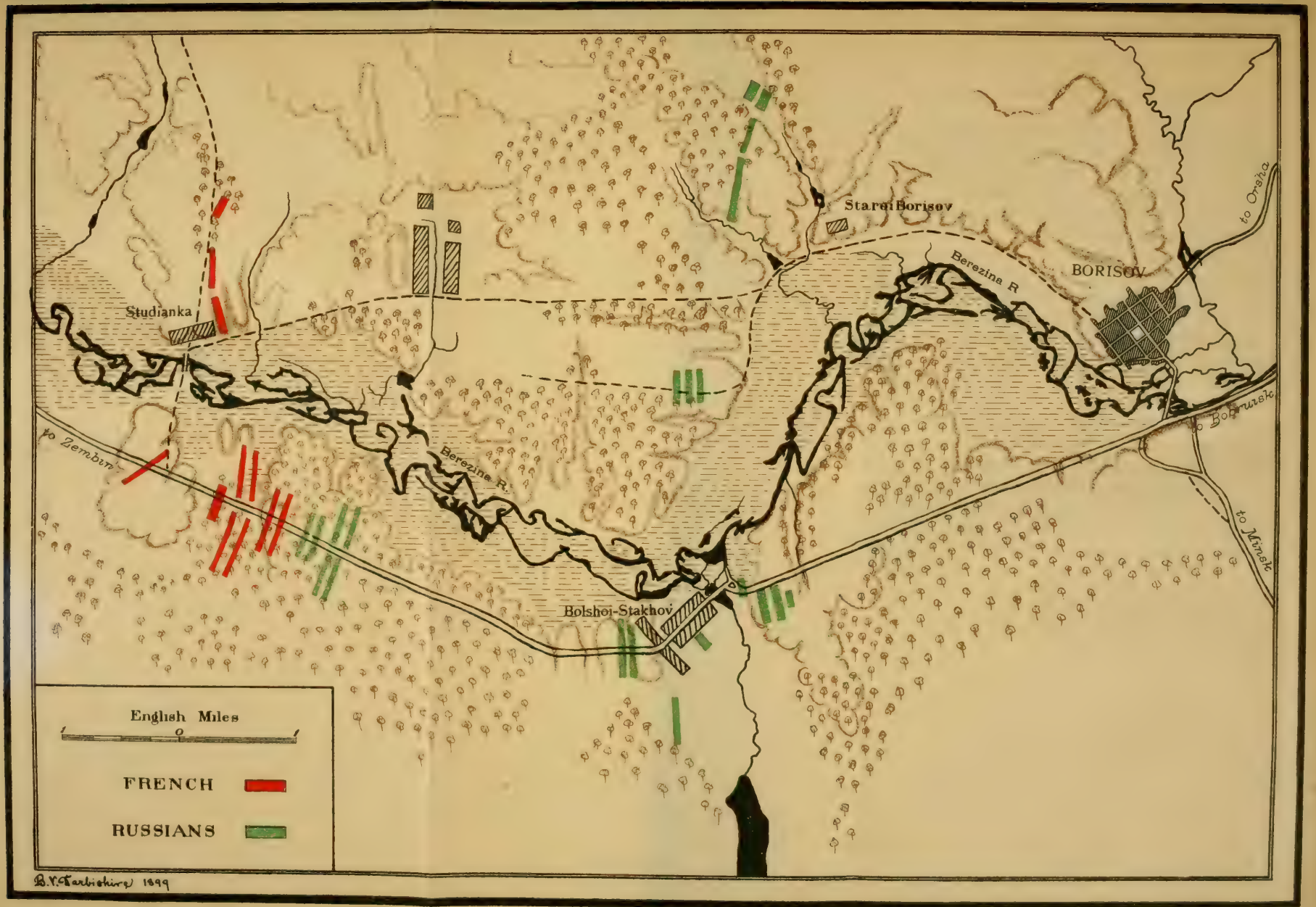
since there was not merely the river but a stretch of marshy ground on the right bank to be crossed, the existing pile bridge being several hundred yards long. Below Borisov the country was thickly covered with woods, and the river banks were still more marshy, so that there were long causeways to traverse, the destruction of any of which would form an insuperable obstacle. High up towards the sources of the river the soil was sandy, and the stream easily passable anywhere. Dode therefore suggested that Napoleon should attack Wittgenstein with his whole force, drive him back, and make his way to Vilna *viâ* Lepel. The Emperor then, says Thiers, sent for Jomini, who also knew the topography, and asked his opinion. Jomini pointed out that going up the Berezina would involve too long a *détour*, and recommended looking for a passage not far above Borisov, and so taking the straightest line to Vilna. Napoleon expressed no opinion at the time: the idea of getting somehow to Minsk, effecting a junction with Schwarzenberg, and, being thus at the head of 80,000 or 90,000 men, ending the campaign with a victory, offered many attractions; to overthrow Wittgenstein would be almost equally satisfactory, and he was reluctant to admit himself entirely beaten by resorting to the shortest line of flight. The arrival of General Corbineau however, with the information he brought, left him in no doubt, and with his unerring sagacity he decided on the right course.

Chambray knows nothing of all this story, rendered highly dramatic by Thiers' manner of relating it. He names another engineer officer as having given the necessary information about Borisov, and quotes a second letter to Oudinot, written at 1 a.m. on the twenty-third, bidding him seize the ford at Veselovo, a village situated about

fifteen miles above Borisov, where the map indicated a ford, and there make his bridges. It was the only chance of escape, and Napoleon had at last forced himself to recognise the truth; and even this was dependent on the enemy. If Chichagov divined what the French were going to attempt, he had force enough to prevent the passage, at any rate till Wittgenstein closed in on their rear. Fortunately for the French Oudinot had already obtained information that led him to choose another point, nearer to Borisov than Veselovo, and exceptionally advantageous for the purpose. Still more fortunately Chichagov, through ignorance of Napoleon's strength at first and then misled by false information coming from both his colleagues, placed the bulk of his forces so far off that no serious opposition was offered to the passage of the French till it was too late to prevent it.

The information reached Oudinot through the skill and judgment of General Corbineau, commanding a brigade of cavalry belonging to the 2nd corps. At the time of the retreat from Polotsk Wrede, commanding the remnant of the 6th corps, had retired in the direction of Glubokoie, Corbineau's brigade being added to his force to supply the necessary cavalry, while the 2nd corps retired almost directly southwards. It is suggested by more than one writer that Wrede wilfully allowed himself to be cut from the 2nd corps by the Russian advance in order to be out of the campaign. Marbot even goes so far as to assert that he only kept Corbineau with him by telling wilful falsehoods. Marbot's authority however is not worth a farthing, unless it be for his own personal adventures, and the insinuations against Wrede will not hold water. It was St. Cyr who originally ordered him to retreat towards Glubokoie, with

the very reasonable object of guarding the route to Vilna; and this implied his being isolated if Wittgenstein followed the 2nd corps, as in fact he did. However, the main army had much more urgent need of cavalry than Wrede, and Corbineau accordingly received orders to rejoin his own corps. On his way he encountered Chernishev with his Cossack escort, taking to Wittgenstein information about Chichagov's intentions, and got the better of a small combat, as regular cavalry matched with Cossacks might be expected to do. They were however too numerous for him to rout, and he had of course no idea of the importance of their errand. After passing Zembin he learned that Chichagov with a large force was at Borisov, and he was therefore obliged to cross the Berezina higher up. A peasant guided him to a ford at Studianka, which he passed on the night of the twenty-first of November, finding the water about three and a half feet deep. Next day he joined Oudinot, who was on his way to Borisov, and his information ultimately decided the marshal on selecting Studianka as the point at which to attempt bridging the river, when Napoleon instructed him to seek for a passage at Veselovo.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CHAPTER XIII.

THE BEREZINA.

Napoleon on the twenty-third of November transferred his head-quarters to Bobr, somewhat more than half-way from Orsha to Borisov. The Moscow army was trailing itself slowly along the road, the Emperor being near to the front, as he had been throughout, and as he now had every motive for being. Victor's corps covered the march on the north, and during the day had a partial encounter with Wittgenstein, who however, probably from lack of definite information,[1] did not press him hard. Immediately after the capture of Borisov Lambert had sent to inform Wittgenstein of the fact, but it does not appear when the latter received either these tidings or the later ones that Borisov had been lost again. He had his choice between following the road from Tchereia to Veselovo and Zembin, or pushing Victor back on Borisov. Napoleon expected him to do the former, and so effect his junction with Chichagov; for on the morning of the twenty-fourth he ordered Victor to move in such a way as to prevent Wittgenstein reaching the Berezina by this route. Victor however had already acted on previous

[1] Clausewitz, who was in Wittgenstein's army, makes it very clear that the information they had was very scanty, and that especially they supposed the Moscow army to be two or three times as strong as it really was.

orders, given when Napoleon was uncertain where he should cross the Berezina, and was some way south of the Tchereia-Zembin road. Theoretically it is plain that Wittgenstein ought to have made the other choice; for theoretically Kutusov ought to have been close on Napoleon's rear, making Wittgenstein unnecessary east of the Berezina. As things in fact turned out, Wittgenstein possibly inflicted more loss on the French by destroying most part of Victor's corps while covering the rear, than he would have done by barring the passage of the river in conjunction with Chichagov.

The news that Oudinot had driven the Russians from Borisov, but had failed to seize the bridge, reached Napoleon that night at Bobr. All uncertainty was now at an end: the Berezina must be bridged, or there was no escape. Napoleon at last faced the situation, and in the extremity of the danger took all needful measures with a care and thoroughness which he had not exhibited since quitting Moscow. He sent forward Eblé with his sappers and precious convoy of tools to assist in making the bridges, Generals Chasseloup and Jomini being also ordered forward to aid in the work. The remnant of the 5th corps and 1,200 more Poles who had formed the garrison of Mohilew were put under Ney's orders, and took place in the line of march after the guard. Further orders were given for destroying vehicles and baggage in order that the horses might be used for the artillery. There was now in the army, including the 2nd and 9th corps, a proportion of guns larger than was in those days usual, thanks to the reserves found at Orsha. The difficulty was to convey them, but this was successfully overcome, at any rate as far as the Berezina. Whatever Napoleon might say in his

impatience, he knew perfectly well both that Oudinot could not construct proper bridges in a moment, and that the army could not reach them if he did. While rightly anxious that Oudinot should effect a lodgment as soon as possible on the right bank of the Berezina, he bade Davout, who now again formed the rear-guard of the Moscow army, march slowly, so that the mass of non-combatants might have time to reach Borisov. It would have been happier for most of them if he had made Davout leave behind all who could not or would not keep up with a reasonably rapid rate of march. But the burden was on the shoulders of the Grand Army, and remained there to the end.

Oudinot meanwhile was face to face with his very difficult task. He was informed of fords at various points, but he had to ascertain whether the information was correct, no easy matter with the enemy everywhere on the opposite bank. He soon satisfied himself that Chichagov was very much stronger than had been supposed, and sent back word, imploring the Emperor to come and direct in person operations so critical. This communication met Napoleon on the road late on the twenty-fourth, but he would not listen, saying that he could not leave the army. Nothing was lost by his refusal, for Oudinot was doing his work admirably. In the course of the day he obtained full and apparently accurate information[1] as to the various points where a passage might be attempted, and showed troops at all, especially below Borisov, so as to perplex the enemy. Late in the evening he made his choice, influenced greatly

[1] The report of the engineer officer employed by Oudinot, in which all the facts are summarised, and the marshal's letter enclosing it to Berthier, are given by Chambray, iii. 191. It is clear that the choice of Studianka was made by Oudinot, and not by Napoleon.

by the knowledge derived from Corbineau, who had actually crossed at Studianka, though the water had risen since then. Corbineau had informed him that the road from Borisov to Zembin ran parallel to the river, about a mile off. The marshy ground on the right bank could be readily commanded by guns placed near Studianka; and the frost that was setting in afresh would rapidly render it passable by vehicles, which it had not been on the night of the twenty-first. Indeed the return of the frost was of incalculable service to the French, for without it not a gun or a carriage of any sort could have reached the road. On the other hand it did not become severe for several days, or the bridges simply could not have been made.

Another piece of great good fortune was that a village of some size lay close to the ford. Thus it was possible by destroying the houses of Studianka to obtain timber for the construction of the bridges, which could have been procured in no other way. Oudinot set to work on the morning of the twenty-fifth to make trestles for the bridge; but he had apparently no skilled labour, and no proper appliances. When Eblé and Chasseloup arrived after dark it was found that all had to be begun afresh. The work went on all night, and at 7 a.m. on the twenty-sixth Napoleon appeared in person to superintend. The preparations being sufficiently forward, a few cavalry forded or swam the river, and were followed by about 400 infantry, who were ferried across on rafts. At the same time the artillery of Oudinot's corps, which had started from Borisov at dusk on the previous day, was ranged on the rising ground behind Studianka so as to command the flat space beyond the river, and to engage any Russian guns which might be brought out on the corresponding slope, 700 yards

or more further back, to fire upon the bridge. Bivouac fires had been seen on the right bank, and the general expectation among the French was that they would experience very active resistance, possibly be unable to construct the bridge at all. By a crowning piece of good fortune however, there were but few troops on the spot, and only two light guns, of too short range to stand for a moment against the French artillery.

The demonstrations which Napoleon had wisely caused to be made below Borisov had doubtless assisted to perplex Chichagov; but he was really suffering under the most ruinous evil that can afflict a general, false information. In the first place he was under the impression that Napoleon's effective strength, with Victor and Oudinot, was 70,000. That was not far from the total number of persons who in a sense formed part of the Grand Army, but less than half were still in fighting condition. As Chichagov had less than 20,000 infantry—he had also 8,000 cavalry, but the woody and marshy country along the Berezina prevented their being of much use for the moment—he supposed that the utmost he could do alone was to retard their passage. On the twenty-fourth he had received a letter from Wittgenstein, expressing his own belief that Napoleon's army was moving partly on Borisov but partly also on Bobruisk, his reason being that Victor had retreated, whereas he assumed that if Napoleon's goal had been Borisov, Victor would have held his ground obstinately at Tchereia to cover the march. At the same time came news that Austrian cavalry parties had been seen on the road between Minsk and Bobruisk. The two items of intelligence combined well: they seemed to imply that Napoleon was attempting to effect a junction with

Schwarzenberg, which would open for him the road *viâ* Brest-Litovsk to Warsaw. Nevertheless Chichagov would not act on the inference: he had the certain knowledge of a considerable French force at Borisov, and he was aware also that they were showing at various places along the river, as if groping for a point of passage. He therefore kept the bulk of his troops near Borisov, sending a division under Tchaplitz up the river as far as Brilova, nearly opposite Studianka, with orders to push cavalry as far as Zembin, and of course watching the whole line of the stream.

If he had retained this position, which until he had definite knowledge of the intentions of the enemy was obviously the right one, Borisov being in the centre of the long stretch of river which he had to guard, all would have been well. Unfortunately he received the next morning a despatch[1] from Kutusov, repeating the statement that Napoleon was moving in several columns in the direction of Bobruisk, and bidding him take care that the French did not go down the left bank of the Berezina, so as to cross towards Igumen. In the position in which Kutusov then was, he could really know nothing of Napoleon's movements. His information could only be several days old, derived from Platov, who was hanging on the rear of the Grand Army. No movement whatever had been made by the French indicating the slightest intention of deviating from the high road. Hence there is no explanation of Kutusov's having sent this entirely untrue communication, except the very far-fetched one that it was done on purpose. He certainly had no love for Chichagov, who as his

[1] Chichagov to the Tzar, under date of the twenty-seventh of November, Russian State Papers, vi. In this letter he gives a lively picture of his perplexities.

successor on the Danube had brought the Turkish war to a successful end; and it is suggested that he wished to deprive him of the credit of finally ruining Napoleon, which he had lost for himself. A more plausible hypothesis is that he was pursuing his fixed idea of "a bridge of gold for a flying enemy," and thought with characteristic cunning that it was easier to get Chichagov out of the way by false information than by direct orders, which the admiral with his independent temper would have been very likely to disobey.

Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that Chichagov did receive this despatch from the commander-in-chief, and did not feel himself at liberty to disregard it. Accordingly on the twenty-fifth, just as the first preparations at Studianka were beginning, he marched twenty miles down the right bank of the Berezina with about half his army, leaving Tchaplitz where he was, and Langeron at Borisov. There is some uncertainty about the proceedings of Tchaplitz, who being opposite Studianka was in the critical position. According to Chambray he received orders on the twenty-fifth to move to Borisov, but did not obey them, as he felt sure that the French were intending a serious attempt to cross in front of him; and he ascertained this positively by a reconnaissance made across the river in the night. According to Buturlin, Tchaplitz was on his way to Borisov on the morning of the twenty-sixth when the bridge-making began, and retraced his steps too late. The latter account seems more in accordance with the certain facts: it explains the ease with which Oudinot established his footing on the right bank. It is scarcely possible that Tchaplitz should have had in all only two light guns, or that if he had been on the spot with any reasonable body of troops he should

have allowed a few hundred men, all that could cross before the bridge was made, to lodge themselves there unresisted. One unfortunate thing Tchaplitz certainly did : he withdrew the cavalry from Zembin, and thereby lost the chance of rendering that road impassable for the French, as might easily have been done. For a long distance it crossed very marshy ground, only passable on wooden causeways except when frozen. These might easily have been destroyed if the Russian cavalry had been on the spot; and the recent return of the frost had not sufficed, when the French passed over it four days later, to render the marsh solid for vehicles. Tchaplitz doubtless shared the general belief in Chichagov's army that the French could not be actually prevented from crossing, and that they would follow their natural line of route towards Minsk. If this had been the case his cavalry detachment at Zembin would have been lost, and he cannot well be blamed for calling it in. Under the real circumstances, however, it was an additional piece of good fortune for the enemy.

The actual construction of the bridges began at 8 a.m. on the twenty-sixth. The original intention had been to make three, but it was found that the materials would not suffice for more than two. They were placed about 200 yards apart, the bridge on the right being intended for infantry and cavalry only ; that on the left was wider and more solid, and was destined for vehicles. The river proved deeper than had been expected, in consequence no doubt of the thaw, which had only begun to affect the volume of water when Corbineau crossed. Hence the labour was frightfully severe for the sappers, who had to work often up to the shoulders in the icy water. There were 400 of them in all, and very few survived the ordeal. General

Eblé, their commander, was an old and broken man, but he never quitted the spot day or night till the passage was complete. Even when the work of construction was done, there was little rest for the engineers: half of them were always on duty in charge of the bridges; several times the heavier bridge broke down; the places where some of the supports had been erected were unfortunately soft and muddy, so that they gave way under the strain. Then the whole force had to be called out to repair the work. The heroism of the soldiers, who two days later held at bay superior enemies on both banks of the river, and snatched something like victory from the very jaws of death, is very justly extolled. But it sinks into insignificance beside the heroism of this handful of engineers, who without the excitement of battle gave themselves up to present toil of the most painful kind, involving practically certain death, for the rescue of the army.

It is a melancholy thought that these brave men's lives were sacrificed in consequence of Napoleon's having destroyed the pontoon train at Orsha. With its aid the bridges could have been constructed in a couple of hours, and without preparation, instead of some twenty hours of incessant labour in preparing the materials and eight spent in the freezing water in fixing the bridges. The delay was however in other respects favourable to the French, little as they could be aware of the fact. If the bridges had been there a day earlier, Chichagov would not have started in the opposite direction, and there would therefore have been much more effective resistance to the crossing. Moreover, the frost of that day served to consolidate the marshy ground beyond the Berezina, which apparently was still too soft for wheels on the twenty-fifth.

The right hand bridge was finished at 1 p.m., and Napoleon immediately sent across Oudinot's corps, which with the addition of Dombrowski's command was still 7,000 strong. He found no difficulty in driving off the few Russians who were watching, rather than defending, the point of passage, and pushing them half-way to Borisov. Here however he encountered solid resistance, Tchaplitz having turned back on the march to Borisov, which he had begun very reluctantly in obedience to orders. Oudinot however was able to maintain his position three or four miles out, the woods which covered the whole right bank of the Berezina from Borisov upwards, except a clearing round the village of Stakhov, being at once a protection against the Russian cavalry and favourable ground for veteran infantry. Some of his cavalry, which though weak in numbers was in better condition than any others in the French army, was despatched to explore the road to Zembin, and found no trace of the enemy there. If any doubt was still lingering in Napoleon's mind, whether to take the shortest route to Vilna or attempt to drive the enemy from Borisov and so reach Minsk, it was finally dispelled on finding the Russians strong towards Borisov and the Zembin road intact.

The second bridge was not finished till 4 p.m., which at that season and in that latitude was after sunset. The artillery of the 2nd corps and of the guard was immediately sent across, though they found the marsh on the right bank still hardly firm; and Ney's command, in which Claparède's Polish division, hitherto attached to the guard, was now incorporated, crossed in the night. Thus on the morning of the twenty-seventh a solid body of 11,000 men, including nearly half the available cavalry of the army,

was established on the right bank. The larger half of Chichagov's army being at a distance, Oudinot was not seriously disturbed during the twenty-seventh, and effective protection therefore existed for the bridges, and a very large part of the non-combatants might have crossed. Unfortunately few of them were on the spot: the great majority were impeding the rear of the army, and those who had reached Borisov had stayed there, believing the reports carefully spread in order to mislead the Russians, to the effect that a passage would be made at or close to Borisov.

In the course of the twenty-seventh the remainder of the French army reached Studianka. Napoleon himself crossed the river about 1 p.m., followed by his guard, and took up his quarters at a hamlet a couple of miles further off, in the direction of Stakhov. All through the twenty-sixth he had personally superintended the bridges, relieved occasionally by Murat or Berthier, and but for the delays occasioned by the left hand bridge giving way, things had gone smoothly enough. Apparently this personal care was not continued after the first day. Certain it is that too little use was made of the bridges in the way of transferring to the right bank the mass of dead weight which clogged the movements of the army. Most of the artillery was indeed taken across: accounts are somewhat conflicting as to the guns abandoned or captured, but the number that left Orsha is given at 260, and of these no small part only arrived at Studianka with Davout and Victor after dark on the twenty-seventh. The artillery belonging to Oudinot and the guard crossed immediately after the bridge was finished. Thus there were only the few guns attached to Ney's corps, and the few that may still have been kept in

the reserve park, to cross on the twenty-seventh. What quantity of provisions and reserve ammunition was conveyed across we do not hear: the relics of the army after quitting the Berezina were certainly not over supplied. There were also carriages for the personal use of the Emperor and others; but again there is no clue to their number. If however a steady and continuous stream of vehicles had been kept going, something like 3,000 might have crossed by 4 p.m. on the twenty-seventh, after allowing for the artillery and for the hours during which the bridge was under repair. This is obviously very far beyond any possible total that the army could have had, apart from the private vehicles of non-combatants, and of the latter comparatively few had arrived before that hour. It may safely be said that whatever baggage public or private was in Studianka, when Victor arrived there in the late afternoon of the twenty-seventh, might have been previously transferred to the right bank if proper use had been made of the precious time. How great the quantity was cannot be ascertained: it is no credit to Napoleon's staff that there was any left behind.

As to the foot-bridge, the case was different. The troops that crossed before the evening of the twenty-seventh were not enough to occupy it for more than a few hours, and it was in fact free for individuals most of the night of the twenty-sixth and morning of the twenty-seventh. How many of the non-combatant mob then actually crossed there is no means of discovering: it was certainly not many, for the bulk of them did not begin to arrive at Studianka till after dark on the twenty-seventh. Napoleon's order to Davout to retard his march, but for which the rear-guard of the Moscow army might easily have reached

Studianka long before, was doubtless dictated, partly if not wholly, by the desire to give the non-combatants time. If so, it failed utterly of its purpose, while costing the army, as events turned out, nearly half of its fighting strength. The mob was so utterly demoralised that it was amenable to no control. The bulk of this mob consisted of fugitives from Moscow, sick and wounded men just capable of dragging themselves along, and the miscellaneous following which it requires very active discipline to keep an army free from. These had most of them gradually sunk into a condition of such apathetic misery that they were incapable of any forethought or any effort. The remainder, consisting of soldiers who had abandoned the colours, were less deserving of pity, and probably even more uncontrollable. If it had been possible to discriminate, no one could fairly have accused Napoleon of inhumanity, if he had refused to sacrifice the soldiers who still remained faithful to their duty for the skulkers who had deserted it. But this was obviously impossible: the non-combatants according to all accounts greatly exceeded the combatants in number. To have enforced any kind of order among them would have left very few troops available for fighting the enemy. Napoleon, there is every reason to think, was ignorant of the true state of affairs, though he is justly blamed for not having made himself thoroughly acquainted with it. His obstinate optimism throughout the retreat made his officers reluctant to incur his anger by speaking out, and doubtful about being believed if they did. If he had known the truth, he might, perhaps he would, have come to the conclusion that it was better for the non-combatants themselves to fall into the hands of the Russians than to let them involve the whole army in total destruction.

If Davout and Victor, instead of rather holding back, had moved as rapidly as their soldiers were reasonably able to do, the whole French army, with all the non-combatants able to keep pace with the march, might well have been over the Berezina by daybreak on the twenty-eighth, with its fighting strength, thanks to the mistakes of the enemy, virtually undiminished.

Chichagov, as we have seen, had gone a day's march down the right bank of the Berezina on the twenty-fifth, in obedience to Kutusov's instructions. Next day he sent reconnoitring parties across the river, who reported next morning that they had found no trace of the enemy. It now became clear that the bridge-making at Studianka, of which he had heard overnight, was no feint; he therefore immediately returned to Borisov. There could still be no certainty that the French, of whom great numbers were visible in Borisov—they were mainly non-combatants, but this he could not discern—might not attempt to cross there also. At any rate he can hardly be blamed for remaining there with the troops which had already done a good day's work, though he sent forward to Stakhov Langeron, who had hitherto been occupying Borisov. Nothing but full knowledge, which he did not possess, could have justified him in ignoring altogether the instructions of the commander-in-chief. Thus Napoleon owed partly to Kutusov, partly to his own judgment in keeping up demonstrations at several points, the advantage that Chichagov could not till the morning of the twenty-eighth attack him in earnest.

Wittgenstein's operations are more open to the reproach of undue slowness. Having rejected the alternative of moving straight from Baran to Veselovo, he had followed

up Victor in his retreat, but had not pressed him vigorously. He was on the night of the twenty-sixth at Kostritza, almost equally distant from Borisov and Studianka, with Victor before him retiring to all appearance on the former. He there learned that the French were making bridges at Studianka, and would have marched straight thither had not the road been impassable for artillery. Being thus compelled to go further south, he directed the march of part of his troops on Staroi Borisov, calculating thus either to intercept Victor or to press him closely when he approached the bridges; the remainder were to move on Borisov. This was done on the twenty-seventh, still without pushing energetically forwards. The consequence was that Victor with two of his divisions had already passed Staroi Borisov: the third, Partouneaux's, had been left by Napoleon's orders to hold Borisov. The road was filled with non-combatants, now at last flocking towards Studianka on the heels of the last troops that could protect them. The Russians coming into the Borisov-Studianka road intercepted part of these fugitives, and it was their return towards Borisov which apprised Partouneaux that he was cut off. Immediately he moved out, in order if possible to force his way past, but the enemy was too strong for him. After some most gallant fighting, in which his force suffered very heavily, Partouneaux was himself taken prisoner, and his troops retreated towards Borisov, and next morning laid down their arms. One battalion, which had been the last to move out of Borisov on the twenty-seventh, by great good fortune made its way to Studianka. Apparently it had fallen some way behind on the march, for while the rest of the division went straight forward, it struck into a small cross road leading through the woods near the river bank,

and so got round the right flank of the Russians engaged with the main body. On the strength of this escape Partouneaux is blamed by some writers: he ought, it is said, to have taken that road, in which case his whole division might have escaped also. Obviously this argument is unsound: it was natural enough that the Russians should not notice a hundred men stealing round when Partouneaux was already attacking their front, but they were posted to stop him, and would naturally have observed his movements. Partouneaux's division, consisting of between 3,000 and 4,000 men, was thus entirely lost, and of course all the stragglers who had been driven back on him were also taken prisoners. Napoleon's orders to Victor, so far as they are extant, are not sufficiently precise to show whether Partouneaux was meant to hold Borisov to the last man, or if not, whether he or Victor was responsible for determining when it would be right to quit the place. But it is quite clear from the Correspondence that Napoleon down to the last moment imagined Victor to be at least equal in strength to Wittgenstein. In a despatch of the twenty-fifth of November[1] Berthier blames Victor for not having given the enemy a good thrashing when once face to face with him; and bids him, if the enemy annoys his retreat, fall on him with one of his divisions. Obviously this is not the kind of conduct to prescribe to a general who has barely half the numbers of his opponent. Even when instructing Victor to take up a position to cover Studianka, Napoleon[2] says that he expects him to be able to hold it several days, while all baggage, etc., is conveyed across the river. Whether under the influence of these illusions the Emperor

[1] Chambray, iii. 465.
[2] Nap. Corr. 19,359.

really believed it to be in his power to save all the *impedimenta* of his army, and then as on other occasions in his career suffered by reluctance to concede or abandon anything, or whether he was really swayed by humane desire at any cost to rescue the non-combatants, is a question which must be answered according to general views of his character.

Eugene and Davout, arriving at Studianka about sunset, were instructed to cross the river during the night, and to take post on the right bank close up to the Zembin road, along which they started next day during the battle. One of Victor's brigades and most part of his artillery also went across, it not being then known that Partouneaux had been cut off. Close on the heels of the troops the non-combatants came pouring into Studianka. Had they been amenable to control, there was opportunity during the long hours of darkness for a very large proportion of them to cross the river. But there was a certain amount of shelter and some fuel available in the ruins of the village; and the weary mob, incapable of looking beyond the sufferings of the present hour, paid little or no heed to whatever attempts were made to persuade them to move on. Testimony differs, as might be expected under such conditions, as to what exactly took place. Some speak as if the bridges were hardly used during the night, others imply that the crowd, with the usual aptitude of a crowd for impeding itself, caused such a block with overturned vehicles, and horses dropping dead, that those who would have crossed could not. Possibly both views are more or less correct, the former true of the foot-bridge, the latter of the other. Certainly there is no trace of Napoleon's staff having been on the spot. The Emperor had told Berthier in the letter

just quoted, containing the order for Victor to cover Studianka, that the passage of the river by vehicles was to be kept up night and day till all had crossed; but like many other of his orders during the disastrous retreat, they could not be, at any rate were not, fulfilled.

On the evening of the twenty-seventh Wittgenstein with the other portion of his troops reached Borisov. The bridge was restored and direct communication opened between him and Chichagov. It was agreed between them that the French should be attacked next morning on both banks of the river. This was of course to be expected, and Napoleon made his dispositions for battle, excellent dispositions if he was to fight at all, if it was not the only rational course to retreat as rapidly as possible by the Zembin road. The fighting began on the right bank about eight o'clock, that is at daybreak. Whether Chichagov had brought up the whole of his army does not clearly appear, but he certainly outnumbered his immediate opponents. The French position extended from the Borisov-Zembin road to the river, Oudinot being on the right, Ney on the left. The guard were in reserve, and they did not in fact take part in the action. The right was covered by a very thick wood, but there were trees without underwood, and not very close together, over most part of the ground. On such a field there was little scope for the use of cavalry, and almost none for artillery. Neither side could bring any guns into action except a few on the road. The action was a most obstinate one, and lasted till late at night, without the Russians being able to make any impression. The chief honour of the day was gained by Doumerc's cuirassiers, who found an opportunity for a most brilliant and successful charge, which inflicted

great loss on the enemy. So far as this specific combat was concerned, victory remained with the French, though something like half of the number engaged were killed or wounded. The Russian loss was at least equal, but of course they were better able to afford it.

The fighting on the left bank was of much the same character, equally creditable to the French arms, equally costly in lives, but less effective in attaining its object. It being obvious that Victor, deprived of Partouneaux's division, was far too weak to hold a position against the strength of attack which might be expected, Napoleon sent back the infantry which had crossed the evening before, a brigade of Baden troops which still numbered over 2,000 men. The bridge was so blocked that it was deemed impossible to send back the artillery. Victor had therefore under his immediate command a very inadequate number of guns. The deficiency was however partly compensated by artillery being so posted on the right bank as to flank the right of his position, which rested on the river. He occupied some high ground rising above Studianka on the Borisov side, partially wooded like all the neighbouring country, especially close to the river bank. There was nothing for his left flank to rest on, but he there stationed the handful of cavalry still remaining. The Badeners were on the right, then the Saxons who formed the rest of Dändels' division, then Girard with his Polish division, much weaker than the Germans. The whole force scarcely amounted to 5,000 men. The Russians attacked about 10 a.m., naturally directing their first efforts against the right, as they thereby threatened to cut Victor from the bridges. At the opening sound of the cannon, the non-combatants hastened towards the bridges, of course blocking one another and forming,

says Chambray who saw it with his own eyes, a confused mass of men, horses and vehicles extending a thousand yards along the river bank, and more than two hundred deep. Such a mass, once formed, was of course utterly unmanageable; but a little calculation will show that if Napoleon's order that the work of crossing the river should be kept up steadily day and night had been obeyed, the non-combatants might have escaped in less time than was afforded them. When Victor's right at length somewhat gave way, and the Russians, obtaining possession of the wood bordering the river, opened a cannonade in the direction of the bridges, a panic naturally seized the mob, which rushed wildly forward, jostling and trampling one another. Many of those who got on to the bridges were pushed off into the water and drowned; every horse that fell, struck by a Russian ball or slipping on the frozen soil, caused the fall of many more, till the whole space in front of the bridges was covered with a mass of broken vehicles, bodies of men and horses, through which no passage was possible. Late in the evening, after the action had ceased, the engineers, assisted by an artillery detachment of whom Chambray was one, had to make a regular cutting through this hideous obstacle.

The ground which the Russians had gained on Victor's right proved untenable, being commanded by the French guns on the right bank. The Badeners reoccupied it, and maintained their position in spite of repeated attacks during the rest of the action, though it cost over half their number. Much the same happened on the other flank: the Russians gained temporary success, but were eventually driven back by the free use of Victor's last remaining cavalry. By no means the whole of Wittgenstein's army

took part in the action, but the number engaged cannot have been far short of three times Victor's force, and their losses exceeded his. The day was eminently creditable to the marshal, and still more to his soldiers, who fought with vigour and tenacity that have seldom been surpassed.

They must have known all the time that the only substantial end for which they were being sacrificed was in order that the weary retreat, in which their comrades of the Moscow army had nearly all perished, might be continued a little further. What they were really defending was the honour of the flag; and it is remarkable that none of them were French. The Poles indeed, unfortunately for themselves, had made belief in Napoleon a part of their patriotic creed, and felt that they were fighting in the cause of Poland. But the Germans could be animated by no such sentiment: all German patriotism of that date was hostile to Napoleon as the oppressor of the fatherland. A more remarkable instance of the over-mastering strength of military discipline it would be difficult to find.

At 9 p.m. Victor received orders to evacuate the left bank. The bridges were so encumbered that it was not till 1 a.m. that the remnants of his corps had crossed. They had more or less cleared away the obstructions, but very few of the non-combatants took advantage of their last chance. Chambray draws a painful picture of their apathy and helplessness. All who could walk might have escaped if they had only abandoned their vehicles, but they clung to them as their sole resource. It is true that they would very probably have perished from cold and want if they had done so, but it was not calculation which influenced them, so much as mere torpid misery. Victor and Eblé vainly

tried to rouse them to an effort: they continued to cower over their bivouac fires. When dawn approached on the twenty-ninth Victor withdrew his small rear-guard. This caused a move towards the bridges, which as there was no sort of order were immediately again blocked. Napoleon's instructions were that the bridges should be set on fire at 8 a.m.; but as no enemy had then appeared, General Eblé waited another half-hour, in the hope of saving a few more lives. When at last the flames rose from the further end of the bridges, a scene of panic and horror ensued far surpassing that of the twenty-eighth. Some wretches tried to rush through the fire; many tried to cross the river on the ice which had now formed between the bridges, but was still too thin to bear their weight; others plunged into the freezing water and attempted to wade or swim across. How many perished it is impossible to tell: several thousands became prisoners to the Cossacks, who appeared on the scene just after the bridges were destroyed. The booty that the Russians obtained was of course enormous: probably not a single vehicle failed to contain some of the plunder of Moscow. Very few guns however were left behind, and no soldiers were captured, thanks to the deliberateness of the Russians' movements. The troops engaged on the twenty-eighth may very well have been tired out by the day's work, but if they had pressed the French through the night very few out of the survivors of Victor's corps could have escaped over the encumbered bridges.

Much praise has been lavished on the skill and courage exhibited by Napoleon at the Berezina, but most of it is ill applied. His "unerring sagacity" in selecting the right point at which to break through the enemy was merely the very ordinary good sense of not rejecting the only chance of

escape. The information given him was conclusive as to the impossibility of effecting a passage at or below Borisov: no great skill was therefore required in deciding to try higher up. Studianka was chosen as the exact spot, not by Napoleon but by Oudinot, and happened to combine every advantage for the purpose, the one drawback of marsh on the right bank being neutralised just in time by the renewed frost. Excellent use was indeed made of the favourable conditions of ground, but all would have been unavailing but for Chichagov being misled into going south of Borisov. Courage indeed there was of the highest order, but it was the courage of the soldiers, who succeeded in holding off a superior enemy, still more of the sappers who died to make a means of escape for the rest: the Emperor was not even under fire. This of course is no imputation on him: it was in no way his duty to seek unnecessary danger. But the courage and endurance which he might have displayed, in striving by the magic of his personal authority to control the helpless masses that crowded the bridges of the Berezina, were conspicuous by their absence. All might have been unavailing: a mob, once panic-stricken, is deaf even to an Emperor's orders, and the panic might not have been averted. But assuredly Napoleon's character would have stood higher if he, like General Eblé, had never quitted the bridges till their work was done. So far indeed was he from personally attending to the bridges, that he and his staff did not trouble to learn what was happening there. The horrible panic on the forenoon of the twenty-eighth, occurring at so vital a point, and in broad daylight, ought, one would imagine, to have caused a sensation at head-quarters, though they were a mile or so off. Yet at 7 p.m. Berthier, sending orders to Victor

about the final evacuation of the left bank, says :[1] "On dit qu'il y a des cadavres d'hommes et de chevaux étouffés à l'entrée des ponts : il faut les faire jeter à l'eau, afin que ces marques de désordre ne soient pas connues de l'ennemi." The amazing imbecility of this language makes one almost forget to notice what indifference it implies.

As during the whole retreat, so also at the Berezina, Napoleon's shortcomings in the management of his difficult task were due to one cause, his blindness to the real facts of the case. As before, so most conspicuously at the Berezina, he owed much to the shortcomings of his opponents. Kutusov, not content with letting himself be distanced—he was crossing the Dnieper at Kopys over sixty miles off on the twenty-seventh of November—kept back his advanced guard, so that only Platov's Cossacks had reached Borisov before the French were over the river. His orders were also the main reason why Chichagov did not oppose the passage more effectually. Another cause of ineffective action was the fact that the Tzar had given no authority to either Chichagov or Wittgenstein over the other. Hence their co-operation was imperfect, and Wittgenstein's methodical slowness went far towards rendering the French escape possible. In spite of all Russian mistakes, in spite of the splendid valour exhibited by Oudinot's men and Victor's alike, the work of destruction was in fact pretty effectually performed. At the Berezina, says Chambray, terminated the history of that Grand Army which had made Europe tremble : it ceased to exist as a military body ; no chance of safety was left to it except in flight.

[1] The despatch is printed in Chambray, iii. 471.

CHAPTER XIV.

END OF THE CAMPAIGN.

The retreat from the Berezina assumed day by day more of the aspect of a flight. The demoralisation which had reduced the Moscow army to a handful, rapidly affected the 2nd and 9th corps also. Both had fought admirably on the twenty-eighth, and had lost very heavily; it would almost seem as if they broke down under the double strain of the excitement of battle in which on the actual field they were victorious, followed by the despondency engendered of hasty retreat. Only three days later the number of men under arms is given by Chambray at below 9,000. Before the passage of the Berezina began the total is stated by the same authority[1] as over 31,000. The exact figures of the losses in action cannot be ascertained, but 11,000 or 12,000 is a very high estimate. This implies that in those three days at least 10,000 men fell sick, were captured by the Russian cavalry who harassed the march without seriously attacking, or simply disbanded and joined the mob of stragglers. On the third of December the cold became intense, and continued till the last French soldiers had quitted Russia. The thermometer is said to have fallen to −30° Réaumur (about 35° below zero Fahrenheit), and seldom or never rose above zero Fahrenheit. The destruction of life then became frightfully rapid, and very few escaped frost-bite

[1] Chambray, iii. 50 and 94.

altogether. There were a few iron constitutions, that had not given way under the long hardships of the retreat from Moscow, which sustained this final ordeal, but the majority succumbed, the fortunate ones quite suddenly as if smitten by sunstroke, others more gradually. Perhaps the most frightful thing to the imagination was the fate of Loison's division, which had arrived at Vilna 10,000 strong a little while before, and was sent a couple of marches out to meet the fugitives and form a rear-guard for them. In three days of bivouacking the division had withered away, scarcely over 3,000 men being left in the ranks.

On the first day of intense cold Napoleon reached Molodetchno on the Minsk-Vilna road. His rear-guard the next day had a somewhat serious encounter with the Russians, and was able to keep them off for the time. But it was evident that the hope which Napoleon had entertained, of being able to give his army a short rest there, must be abandoned. Any halt would give time for the enemy to come up in irresistible numbers, while the fighting strength of the army was diminishing rapidly. Wrede, who had been since the retreat from Polotsk somewhere between that place and Vilna, and who had received reinforcements bringing his corps up to over 4,000 men, was charged to protect the flank, falling back on Vilna as the main body moved. He was however by no means strong enough to cope with Wittgenstein, who was marching in a line parallel to Napoleon's route, but further north. Thus a halt was impossible, even assuming that the rear-guard could keep the direct pursuers at bay; and the hopelessness of this may be gathered from the fact that on the night of the fourth Victor reported to Berthier that his corps was completely used up, and could not even keep off the pursuing

cavalry. Vilna was known to contain ample stores : to it, as at an earlier stage to Smolensk, the worn-out troops looked forward as to the promised land. They were doomed in fact to equally grievous disappointment, but anyhow it was essential not to be cut off from Vilna, and this was perfectly possible if Wittgenstein was given time to outstrip them.

At Molodetchno the way seemed however to be open not to Vilna only, provided that no halt was made, but also to the south-west. There was a garrison at Smorgoni, and Loison would be met at Ochmiana. The remnant of the Poles[1] was sent straight off towards Warsaw, thus relieving slightly the Vilna road. Napoleon now thought that the time was approaching when he could execute his design,[2] apparently not newly formed, of quitting the army, and returning straight to Paris. His conduct in so doing has often been stigmatised as selfish, almost cowardly ; but the reproach is unfair, like the analogous complaint that he did not share the sufferings of his soldiers. It is possible enough that his illusions as to the real state of things during the retreat were encouraged by his not enduring hardships himself : it is in human nature that such an effect should be produced more or less unconsciously. His staff may or may not have given an undue share of their attention to securing the Emperor's personal comfort ; but

[1] They were not molested on their march, and reached Warsaw safely. The few guns belonging to this detachment were the only ones saved out of the whole artillery of the Grand Army, exclusive of Macdonald and Schwarzenberg.

[2] Nap. Corr. 19,362, is a letter to Maret, dated the twenty-ninth of November, in which for the first time he uses language implying that things were very bad with the army. Towards the end he says : "In this state of things I may possibly think my presence in Paris necessary for France, for the Empire, for the army itself : tell me your opinion."

it was perfectly reasonable that the commander-in-chief, upon whom in the last resort all depended, should be preserved from frost-bite and from starvation on the same principle on which he avoids exposing himself needlessly to bullets. Similar considerations applied when the route to Paris at length lay open before him. The mob of fugitives which represented the army could gain nothing by his continuing to accompany their flight. He was a sovereign as well as a general, and the cares of the former office had now the more pressing claim. Fears for the stability of his throne he probably did not feel: the history of the Mallet conspiracy rather tended to show that France had nothing wherewith to replace him, but it also showed how entirely the existing *régime* depended on the personal direction of the Emperor. Moreover, if the war was to continue, not an hour must be lost in raising new levies, and replacing the cavalry and artillery; and for this his own presence at the seat of government was indispensable.

The time was also close at hand at which the world must know that the invasion of Russia, which was to have made Napoleon master of the world, had ended in failure. Hitherto very little had been known: Napoleon had adhered steadily to his system of concealing everything except what he chose to announce in his bulletins. The fact that he had successfully occupied Moscow was a sufficient contradiction to the Russian claims of having achieved victory in the field, if indeed the Russian bulletins penetrated Europe. Napoleon's previous career had been a series of military triumphs, so that the probabilities seemed all in favour of his being equally victorious again. France had no suspicion of what it had cost to reach Moscow, still

less of the prospects of disaster on the return march. The press under the Empire was so completely fettered that no news from foreign sources found its way into print. Statements from English newspapers were indeed published, but only by way of giving the impression that the English government was attempting to bolster up the failing energies of its people by false information. It cannot be denied that this system had on the whole answered. It had rendered the disaster somewhat more complete through the ignorance in which the wings were left, but it had averted the absolute ruin which must have followed if Germany had risen in revolt.

Now however the time was near when the truth must be known, when a mob of helpless fugitives, ragged, unarmed, demoralised, would show themselves to Europe as the survivors of half a million soldiers. It was necessary that some preparation should be made for the appearance of this appalling spectacle, and the task was all the harder because of the gross falsehoods contained in previous bulletins. The twenty-seventh had represented Maloyaroslavetz as a complete victory, and had declared the Russian regular infantry to be destroyed. The twenty-eighth, dated from Smolensk, had announced that no enemy save Cossacks had since appeared, except once at Viasma, when they had been entirely defeated. Since then there had been silence, inevitable because the communications were cut, but naturally giving rise to alarming rumours. At the Berezina a Polish Jew reached Napoleon with a letter from Maret, the first intelligence he had received for over a fortnight: previous messengers had doubtless been killed or captured. Two or three of his own letters had come to Maret's hands during the interval, but they contained only

scraps of information. In the despatch of the twenty-ninth of November already referred to, Napoleon begins to clear the way, not only for his own return to France, but also for the fact of his failure becoming known. He confesses that the army is not fit to be seen, and bids Maret send all the representatives of his allies away to Warsaw, so that they may not behold the spectacle. The next day went another letter to Maret[1] giving orders for preparations at Vilna, where he still hoped that the retreat might terminate, and characteristically putting the blame for all disasters on others—on Schwarzenberg, who had "cruelly compromised" him by letting the Russians reach Minsk; on Victor, but for whose "shameful inaction" he could have taken winter quarters at Smolensk, Vitepsk, Orsha, Mohilew. On the second of December an aide-de-camp was sent off to Paris with a letter to the Empress, and with instructions[2] to announce everywhere a great victory on the Berezina, with the capture of 6,000 prisoners and eight standards. He is to describe how Chichagov and Wittgenstein tried to cut off the army, "mais qu'elle leur a marché sur le ventre, qu'elle est arrivée a Vilna, où elle trouve de nombreux magasins qui l'auront bientôt remise des souffrances qu'elle a éprouvées."

Grossly false as all this was, it may be deemed a necessary stratagem, in order to secure Napoleon's personal safety in passing through Germany. This consideration is of course inapplicable to the twenty-ninth bulletin, which contained the first announcement to his subjects of the failure of the campaign, and was not meant to see the light until published in Paris. The twenty-ninth

[1] Nap. Corr. 19,363.
[2] Nap. Corr. 19,364.

bulletin has often been represented as a frank statement of the truth, and Napoleon has even been held up to admiration for having had the courage to own it. As a matter of fact, it is as mendacious as any other in the series. It of course admits a considerable disaster, but minimises it as far as possible. It attributes the whole misfortune to the cold killing the horses. It declares that the Russians were "culbutés" whenever they dared to make a serious attack. All this may be perhaps excused: there was policy in softening the evil tidings to France, and the temptation would have been strong, even to a truthful man, to exculpate himself by making the irresistible forces of nature responsible for his overthrow. What is utterly unpardonable, what stamps Napoleon afresh as the most brutally selfish of mortals, is his language about his troops. He expresses himself satisfied with the conduct of his guard, who had never fought during the whole campaign, because the mention of that fact serves to suggest that he never was in real military difficulties. There is not a word of commendation for the rest of the army, which had terally perished in his service. Rather there is an insinuation, in the paragraph about those who did not preserve their gaiety and good humour, that the sufferings, which he himself never shared, were not really serious. That the demoralisation was more widespread than was fully justified even by the terrible hardships endured, has been already shown. But this made it all the more imperative a duty for the Emperor to acknowledge, in the most generous terms, the endurance and fidelity of those who did not break down. Finally the bulletin ends by stating, as if it compensated for everything, that the health of his Majesty had never been better.

Meanwhile Maret was inundated with letters,[1] which throw much light on the habit which Napoleon had fallen into, of expecting his lieutenants to have done everything which he might afterwards think to have been desirable, while they well knew that he would be extremely severe on every step taken without his direct order which did not happen to prove useful. Their main topic is subsistence, which he chooses to represent as the one thing needful to restore the army to efficient strength. Ten days of rest and plenty of food will, he gives Maret to understand, suffice to bring back to the colours 100,000 men. Incidentally he grossly slanders his soldiers, saying that though the rank and file do not murmur, "au moment que sa distribution n'est pas complète, il quitte le drapeau et court la campagne." One cannot escape from the alternative: either he believed all this, in which case he had utterly neglected the obvious duty of a commander-in-chief to know the real state of things in his army; or he did not, in which case he was wilfully deceiving the one man who on every ground needed to know the truth, and was at the same time cruelly unjust to his soldiers. Then he asks whether Kowno and Vilna are fortified. Assuredly it was not the business of a subordinate to decide on such a vital question as how to guard the main line of communication. Which points should be fortified, and how, were matters that Napoleon ought himself to have determined: he had in fact given orders[2] on this subject relating to places further east. But in his assured confidence of success he had done nothing of the sort at the beginning; and

[1] There were no less than seven dated from Molodetchno (Nap. Corr. 19,367—19,373), where Napoleon only halted for a night.

[2] *E.g.*, Nap. Corr. 19,130.

when the retreat began he had been too intent on concealing from himself and from every one else the extent of his disasters, to give orders himself, or to allow any information to penetrate which might have suggested to others the importance of such defensive measures. The rest of these letters is taken up with invectives against Lithuania and Poland in general for not having done their duty by him, and against his own agents for not having made them do it. According to the ancient Polish constitution, he declares, all the minor nobility were bound to serve on horseback, therefore why are they not doing it now of their own accord? Probably they would have done so, if Napoleon had chosen to proclaim the restoration of the kingdom of Poland, but he had not cared to pay the price. It was entirely in accordance with his usual habit to expect men to devote themselves quite gratuitously to his service, and to abuse them if they looked for any return.

On the fifth of December Napoleon, arriving at Smorgoni, summoned his principal officers, and informed them of his intention to return immediately to Paris. The chief command was nominally handed over to Murat, who could hardly have been passed over if he remained with the army, in view of his royal rank. Napoleon would have done better to let Murat return to Naples, and carry away to Paris most of the marshals, leaving one, preferably Ney or Eugene, to conduct the remainder of the retreat. There had been serious quarrels among them in the course of the campaign. Davout and Murat in particular were on permanently hostile terms, the former having repeatedly and apparently with great justice accused the latter of wasting the cavalry through overworking them, while not caring for their subsistence. Davout and Ney agreed little better. Ney and

Victor had had differences since the Berezina. There was however so little left to command that it did not much signify for the moment, and possibly the fiction that the Grand Army still existed was better maintained by the corps commanders remaining with head-quarters. Practically Murat exercised no authority: the generals who had still a few men in the ranks acted pretty much as they thought fit. The orders issued by Murat, or in his name, were as little capable of fulfilment as some of the Emperor's had been, and in the complete disorganisation were even more openly disobeyed.

The written instructions which Napoleon left behind him for Murat proceed on the assumption that the army will be able to maintain itself in Vilna, and take winter quarters there. This has been criticised severely, notably by Chambray, on the ground that he must have known it to be out of the question, and that therefore his only purpose must have been to shift blame on to the shoulders of others. Such was no doubt too often his practice; but in this case it is only fair to remember that when these instructions were written Loison's division was still intact, the intense cold was only beginning to kill, and Napoleon did not know that Vilna was not fortified. On the other hand the letters to Maret above quoted show that he was then contemplating the chance of having to abandon Vilna, and certainly nothing can have come to his knowledge during the intervening day to render this less probable.

The same evening Napoleon finally quitted the army, taking with him Caulaincourt, Duroc, and Mouton only. Believing the route to be clear, he dispensed with escort beyond a handful of horsemen, and it was only by good fortune that he escaped the enemy. A body of Russian

irregular cavalry that very day made a dash on Ochmiana, a third of the distance from Smorgoni to Vilna, but were just anticipated by Loison's division coming out from Vilna to meet the Grand Army. If they had happened to bivouac east of Ochmiana instead of south of it, or if the commander had by any means learned Napoleon's purpose, the Emperor could hardly have escaped capture. This was however the last risk he ran, nor indeed was he perhaps himself ever aware of it. A little further on he met Maret, who returned with him to Vilna. According to Chambray[1] he reproached Maret for not having provided for the wants of the army, food, clothes, shoes, and was reassured on hearing of the vast accumulations in Vilna. His last words to the minister bade him stay till Murat arrived, and make him halt the army there eight days if possible, "afin de refaire le moral et le physique du soldat." Even eight days would have been a welcome respite, though that time would have barely sufficed to begin the work of resting the soldiers. But Napoleon's order could only have been executed if the enemy had ceased to pursue. There was no strength left for fighting except on the very smallest scale. A very few days would have sufficed to bring the Russians past Vilna, cutting off all retreat. Leaving Vilna again in an hour or two, he went straight to Warsaw, and thence *viâ* Dresden to Paris, making only the briefest halts on the journey. This great speed saved any risk of unpleasant things happening on the way, since it was scarcely possible for any intelligence to have outstripped him; but it is absurd to regard personal fear as his motive for haste. It was Napoleon's almost invariable habit to travel night and day, thus saving time, since he did not find it fatiguing. Early on the eighteenth

[1] Chambray, iii. 109.

of December he reached Paris, arriving as he had intended just after his bulletin, it being still unknown that he had quitted the army.

The departure of the Emperor, when announced three days later, naturally tended to increase the general disorganisation. Some reviled him for deserting them, the majority merely wished they could have done the like, but all felt that it implied the disappearance of all hope of any improvement in their lot. Almost all semblance of military order disappeared: there was little but a stream of fugitives hastening towards Vilna, so many as did not die of cold by the way. One short paragraph from the narrative of Fezensac, perhaps the least prone to exaggeration of all the many eye-witnesses who have described this fatal scene, may suffice without any further description of its horrors. "Qu'on se représente des plaines à perte de vue couvertes de neige, de longues forêts de pins, des villages à demi brûlés et déserts, et à travers ces tristes contrées une immense colonne de malheureux, presque tous sans armes, marchant pêle-mêle et tombant à chaque pas sur la glace, auprès des carcasses des chevaux et des cadavres de leurs compagnons. Leurs figures portaient l'empreinte de l'accablement ou du désespoir, leurs yeux étaient éteints, leurs traits décomposés et entièrement noirs de crasse et de fumée. Des peaux de mouton, des morceaux de drap, leur tenaient lieu de souliers: ils avaient la tête enveloppée de chiffons, les épaules revêtues de couvertures de chevaux, de jupons de femme, de peaux à demi brûlées. Aussi, dès que l'un d'eux tombait de fatigue, ses camarades le dépouillaient avant sa mort, pour se revêtir de ses haillons."

Chambray makes the curious reflection, which seems however sound, that the sudden intense cold by which the

French suffered so severely was nevertheless favourable to their cause. Both sides suffered about equally, but the Russians lost vigorous soldiers, whereas the French victims were mainly worn-out men, who must in any case have succumbed, or fallen into the hands of the enemy if the pursuit had been pressed closely, as but for the cold it might have been.

Things were practically little better when the haven of Vilna was at length reached. No one in Vilna had an idea of the true state of affairs, except possibly Maret. It was only on the evening of the seventh of December that Berthier wrote to the governor to say that the guard would arrive next day. The orders contained in this despatch[1] embody instructions that Napoleon had left behind him, under the impression that a halt could be made at Vilna, for sorting to their respective corps all isolated soldiers. This was an obviously right thing to do if possible, though it would have required much time and patience to restore order and discipline among a mob of men so worn out and demoralised. The despatch further ordered that all dismounted men should be mustered in bodies of 500 and sent off in succession, also that the ponies were to be taken from all disbanded men on their reaching Vilna and appropriated for the artillery, or for removing the treasure which was to go to Königsberg and Warsaw. It also directed that all sick should be sent to the rear, including soldiers who might apply to go into hospital. Finally it asked for information as to the villages within four or five miles of Vilna in which soldiers could be quartered. All this obviously pointed to a state of things as imaginary as that described in the twenty-ninth bulletin, to an army arriving

[1] Printed in Chambray, iii. 227.

in considerable strength though seriously in need of rest, to the expediency of clearing the town of encumbrances in order that the army might occupy it, to no unusual amount of sickness. The system of concealment was maintained to the bitter end, when nothing could be gained, and much might be lost by it. The governor need have been a man possessing extraordinary energy and an ample staff to effect anything. He had neither, and followed only too well the absurd method of assuming the non-existent.

When the fugitives began to arrive, the crush at the entrance of the town soon became such that no order was possible. Officers and men alike spread through the streets seeking for food and shelter. The inhabitants, who had hitherto thriven on the war, were horrified to find that they were being invaded by a huge and starving mob. Most of them shut themselves up in their houses: the Jew shopkeepers reaped a rich harvest, many of the French having money though nothing else; and unless the memoirs are all untrue, they treated atrociously the helpless wretches who had paid highly for shelter, as soon as Vilna was again evacuated. The town was full of stores, but the governor thought it the proper way to carry out his instructions that the disbanded soldiers should be sorted, to issue no food except through the regular machinery. As the organisation of the army had ceased to exist, the men had no idea where to look for the head-quarters of their regiment, even of their corps, and were too worn out to search at random. The result was that most of the fugitives got nothing out of the abundance of Vilna, except what they could purchase for themselves: most part of the stores which had been laboriously accumulated were left for the benefit of the enemy.

The administration has been often blamed for having

kept all these supplies at Vilna, instead of pushing them forward to all manner of intermediate points. There is however no reasonable ground for this. Large depôts, if not protected by adequate garrisons, would merely have attracted the Russian light horsemen, and for adequate garrisons no troops were available. Moreover no one knew the straits to which the Moscow army was reduced, which would have justified sending forward supplies on the chance of their proving useful. And no one knew, or could know till after the passage of the Berezina, by what route Napoleon would approach Vilna. There were some small supplies at Smorgoni, the furthest point from Vilna which it was certain the army must pass, and there were vast magazines at Minsk, which the enemy had seized. One thing was certainly neglected, though the blame, so far as any is reasonable, must fall on Napoleon himself. It was possible to have protected Vilna by intrenchments, which would have given some help in defending the place, and thus possibly have gained a few days for rest to the fugitives. It is more than doubtful, however, whether any real advantage would in fact have been gained. An intrenched camp constructed at leisure would pretty certainly have been far too large to be held by the handful of troops that were still in fighting condition when the Grand Army reached Vilna. And it was impossible to do any work of the kind at the last moment, with the ground frozen to iron.

Of the fugitives who entered Vilna a large proportion never left the town again. Many were already badly frost-bitten, and through injudicious warmth and lack of care the frozen members gangrened. Others had already broken down, had with great difficulty been conveyed so far, and when once they found themselves on beds, even of straw,

were unable to rise again. Others were destroyed by suddenly having access to spirits, which many no doubt drank in the mistaken belief that it was the best way to resist the cold. Many who had braced every nerve for the effort of reaching Vilna, collapsed utterly when the need for continuous exertion was, or seemed to be, at an end. Between 15,000 and 20,000 men, most of them entirely helpless, were left behind when the remainder pushed on to Kowno. It needs no words to show how disastrously the concealment of the true state of things worked for these poor wretches. With timely notice it would not have been impossible to provide a much larger amount of hospital accommodation, and to supply the hospitals at any rate with food. That such preparations would have spread alarm is true: but the bargain was a harsh one which condemned the last relics of the Grand Army to perish, in order that its reputation might be a little longer preserved.

No serious attempt was or could be made to halt in Vilna. Chambray estimates the number of men under arms on the tenth at 4,300 only, very few of them mounted. It was not even deemed possible for the rear-guard, which absorbed practically the whole body except the remnant of the guard, to hold Vilna during the day on which the head-quarters began its forced march on Kowno. Murat's brilliant dash on the battlefield was not accompanied by the sterner courage which faces difficulties, and is most conspicuous when the horizon is darkest. He was almost indecently eager to continue the retreat, refusing even to stay in the town, and sleeping in a house on the Kowno side, so as to be able to start at the earliest moment in the morning. Orders were indeed issued in his name, but they were really Berthier's, and were the obvious promptings of necessity.

Schwarzenberg was instructed to withdraw to Bialystok, Macdonald to Tilsit. If it should prove possible to rally something of a force behind the Niemen, these wings would be of inestimable value. The possibility of it must depend on whether the Russians pressed the pursuit in earnest, or merely harassed it with cavalry. One very sensible order was given, that food and clothes should be supplied to the soldiers abundantly and indiscriminately. Unfortunately it was too late: the march was begun in the night, and was pressed with all haste, for Platov was already at hand.

A few miles from Vilna, on the direct road to Kowno, is a steep hill, which cost the Grand Army its last guns, for the road became so slippery that it proved impossible to drag them up it. The treasure waggons, containing six million francs in coined money and the last spoils of Moscow, were abandoned for the same reason, and were partly pillaged by the soldiers, who after their experiences in Vilna were glad to help themselves to a little money, though a great deal fell into the hands of the Russians. Platov had entered Vilna on the heels of the retiring French, and had pushed on in pursuit. According to Buturlin, some of his light guns cannonaded them before reaching the foot of the fatal hill. The French accounts do not mention this: it was perhaps too ordinary an incident of the retreat to be recorded. A little forethought might have averted this particular disaster, for a somewhat longer but quite level road to Kowno, through Novi Troki, turned off to the left a little way on the Vilna side of the hill. No one however thought of anything but the straight road; and the guns and the treasure would probably in any case have been captured, or abandoned of necessity, before

the Niemen was reached. The seventy miles to Kowno were accomplished in three days: but even there rest was not attainable. The Niemen was frozen, so that the Russians could have surrounded the place with ease. There were some guns in reserve at Kowno, some of which were planted on high ground above the left bank of the Niemen to cover the passage, while Ney with the remnant of the rear-guard defended the town. There were even worse scenes of disorder than at Vilna, for the stores were plundered, and men in hundreds lay drunk in the streets. Mechanically the fugitives crowded over the bridge, impeding one another most uselessly, for they could have crossed anywhere on the ice. Ney held possession of Kowno till dusk, but by that time a body of Cossacks had passed the river on the ice, and occupied the hill commanding the bridge and road, capturing some of the guns. The only way open for Ney was down the left bank towards Tilsit. This route he took in the night, then keeping to the left made his way eventually to Königsberg.

After quitting Russia the fugitives had some respite from their sufferings, the enemy having waited awhile before crossing the Prussian frontier. The country was also richer and more populous, and nominally friendly, though the people made it pretty clear that they detested the French alliance. Königsberg was the first goal, but it being deemed impossible to hold any position further east than the line of the Vistula, no time was lost in spreading the head-quarters of the various corps along that river. Here every effort was made to restore order, to reclothe and re-arm stragglers, and adequate food and warmth did wonders. In a fortnight the 3rd corps, for instance, which had reached its quarters at Marienwerder 120 strong, had

over 1,000 men with the colours.[1] On the sixth of January came orders to retire still further, behind the Oder, it being considered impossible to maintain the line of the Vistula against the enemy, who had now spread over East Prussia, in consequence of what had befallen Macdonald's corps in the last days of the year.

Meanwhile the Russian movements had been determined largely by the desire to save men. After crossing the Berezina Kutusov, though he came in person to Vilna to take the supreme command of all the armies, put most of his own immediate forces into cantonments. They had suffered cruelly from the cold, in spite of easy marches and no fighting since Krasnoe. Buturlin gives the official figures for the fourth of December, which show only 40,000 under arms out of a total which ought to have amounted to 88,000, the rest being nearly all in hospital. He calculated that the rest of the Russian forces in the field would suffice to drive the remnant of the French out of Russia, and beyond the frontier the bulk of the army was not to go at present. Platov with the Cossacks and some other cavalry was far in advance harassing the retreating French. From this congenial task he did not withdraw him. Chichagov however was also to follow them as far as the Niemen. Wittgenstein was directed to intercept Macdonald, who must needs be recalled to the Niemen, and whose march it was intended should be pressed by the Riga force coming up behind. Finally a sufficient number of troops, made up of various smaller bodies, were despatched towards the Narew

[1] Chambray (iii. 163) gives the figures for the first four corps at about this date: his numbers run higher than those in the text: but Fezensac, who himself commanded the 3rd on the march from Königsberg to Marienwerder, seems a more trustworthy authority.

to follow up Schwarzenberg, who it was assumed would not show fight seriously, as the Russians were beginning, a little prematurely, to expect Austria to come over to their side.

Schwarzenberg withdrew slowly into the duchy of Warsaw, and then, as the relics of the Grand Army fell back first to the Vistula and then to the Oder, into Austrian territory. There is no doubt that he and Reynier might easily have gained some advantage over their immediate opponents, and it is likely enough that political considerations were not altogether without weight in determining his cautious action. From the strictly military point of view however, and on the assumption that the alliance would last, there was much to be said for Schwarzenberg's course. The campaign as a whole had been a failure, and the failure could no longer be redeemed by any successes in a remote corner of the theatre of war. It was better to save a body of seasoned troops for the next campaign than to expend them in inflicting even greater loss on the enemy.

If Schwarzenberg's retreat on the right wing was uneventful, Macdonald's on the left was on the contrary highly eventful, and still more highly significant in its bearings on the future. During the latter part of the retreat from Moscow, in fact ever since Steingell's abortive attempt to break up the nominal siege of Riga, Macdonald had remained inactive. Information only reached him through Maret, and as Napoleon kept even Maret ignorant of the true state of things, he had no knowledge of what was going on. Whether pressing cares nearer at hand rendered Napoleon forgetful of Macdonald altogether, or whether he deliberately thought it better not to summon

the 10th corps to his assistance, cannot be known. The certain fact is that the first instructions to Macdonald were sent from Vilna on the tenth of December in Murat's name, some days after Napoleon had quitted head-quarters. These orders, which do not seem to have contained explicit information as to the fate of the Moscow army, bade him retire to the Niemen. Macdonald was on very bad terms with General York, commanding the Prussians who formed the greater part of his corps, and suspected him of being ready to betray the cause in which he was engaged. Hence he had refused to believe the rumours of overwhelming disaster to Napoleon's army, which had reached his camp from Prussian sources many days earlier, treating them as inventions or exaggerations of York's, intended to damage Napoleon's interests. The reports were no inventions, they were indeed below the truth, and York had hitherto done his work ably and successfully. Nevertheless Macdonald's suspicions were not altogether baseless. York as a Prussian patriot held opinions, of which he made no secret, decidedly hostile to the present policy of his government, though he had not gone the length of quitting his country to enter a foreign service, like Gneisenau and Clausewitz and many others. Hence when Napoleon insisted that the command of the Prussian contingent should be given to General Grawert, an old and infirm man, perhaps the only general in the Prussian service who was a partisan of the French alliance, it was a stroke of good policy to make York second in command. He could in that capacity act as a check on his chief, and was ready to succeed if Grawert should break down, as in fact happened. His relations to Macdonald soon grew so hostile that each formally complained of the other: the

fault seems to have lain chiefly with York, whose unconciliating behaviour made the most of some real grievances. Whatever communications York received from Berlin, he certainly had no sort of authority to act independently of Macdonald. The Prussian nation was, as York well knew, longing for the moment when it could throw off Napoleon's yoke; but Hardenberg thought the time hardly yet come for any open step, and the King still less. Nor had York in fact done anything to justify the suspicions based on his known views: indeed he had refused to listen to overtures from the Russian commander at Riga.

Macdonald must under the circumstances have hailed the order to retreat on Tilsit, which was for some reason very long in reaching him, as a welcome relief from a very awkward position. On the nineteenth of December he left Mitau with half his corps, his non-Prussian division and a few Prussian battalions under General Massenbach, leaving York to follow with the remainder at two marches' interval. Meanwhile Wittgenstein, still 25,000 strong, had already begun to move towards Tilsit in order to seek out Macdonald. With great good judgment he sent two detachments far in advance, one under Major-General Kutusov close to the Niemen, by the route which he was himself intending to follow, the other further to the north. The latter was commanded by the Prussian Diebitsch, afterwards distinguished in the Russo-Turkish war of 1828. Clausewitz was serving on his staff, and we owe to this circumstance by far the clearest account which exists of the transactions that ended in York's capitulation.

Wittgenstein on the twentieth of December was at Wilkomirz, Kutusov at Georgenburg where the road which Wittgenstein intended to follow crosses the Niemen, and

Diebitsch at Koltiniany on the Riga-Tilsit road. There being no tidings of Macdonald, who had only just begun to move, Diebitsch thought that the expectation at Wittgenstein's head-quarters, that Macdonald would march on Memel, must be correct, and proceeded in that direction. On the twenty-third he learned that Macdonald was after all moving straight on Tilsit, and immediately turned back. Reaching Koltiniany early on the twenty-fifth, he was informed that the rear-guard of Macdonald's corps had not yet passed. Diebitsch had only 1,400 cavalry and a few guns on sledges, but he boldly sent an officer to tell the enemy that he was intercepted, and suggest a conference that might save useless bloodshed. The reply informed him that he had York's whole command on his hands, some 10,000 strong, though the main body would only come up in the evening. Macdonald on reaching Koltiniany had taken advantage of the two roads to Tilsit; his troops were therefore about half on each road, two marches off. His attention however was urgently required in front, for Kutusov with Wittgenstein's other advanced detachment was between him and Tilsit. This danger proved to be more apparent than real, for Kutusov, by no means strong enough to prevent Macdonald's eastern column from reaching Tilsit, fell back to the south of the Niemen. The marshal was himself on the western road, and moved very slowly, so as not entirely to abandon York, communication with whom had been interrupted by Diebitsch.

York was thus isolated; he could expect no support if attacked, and he was out of reach of any fresh orders from his chief. If he found the enemy strong enough to bar his way to Tilsit, he must judge for himself, but until he had

tried to break through and failed, his military duty was plain. As a matter of fact Diebitsch was far too weak to stop him, though this he did not know. From the purely military point of view the only excuse for his listening to the suggestion of a conference was the fact that, being very short of cavalry, he was entirely ignorant both of the strength of the enemy immediately before him, and of Diebitsch's distance from Wittgenstein. Politically the case was very different; it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that York's position was unique. He commanded the contingent furnished by his country altogether against her will to a nominal ally who had tyrannised over her atrociously. His troops had discharged the duty assigned to them in the campaign, which had resulted in the total ruin of the main army. The time was at hand when Prussia could do what every man under York's command was longing for, what every principle of national morality entitled her to do, turn her arms against the tyrant. The question for York was whether he should continue to obey Napoleon, at the risk of sacrificing a great part of his troops, or whether he should act independently of all authority, preserving to his country many thousands of veteran soldiers, but going far towards committing her to a new political departure. Those who regard unqualified obedience as the soldier's one duty will condemn York, and there cannot be a doubt that this rule is in general sound. The question is whether the rule admits of any exceptions, and if so whether this is one of them. York knew perfectly well that he was personally risking everything. At the moment of deciding to come to terms with the Russians he said to one of his officers, who was delighted at the prospect, "You young men may talk, but my head is shaking on my

shoulders."[1] If military obedience is to be regarded as absolutely paramount, York was a traitor. If there are ever circumstances in which a soldier is justified in being a citizen first, a military machine afterwards, York was a patriot of the most devoted kind. "Que mon nom soit flétri, pourvu que la France soit libre," said Danton in the great crisis of the French Revolution. York acted on the same principle, and whether his name be stained or not, he went far towards freeing his country.

Diebitsch and York met on the evening of the twenty-fifth of December, immediately after the latter's arrival at Koltiniany. The Russian general informed York that the Tzar's orders were not to treat the Prussians as enemies, any more than could be avoided, and convinced him also of the total destruction of Napoleon's main army. At the same time he did not conceal his own inability to stop York's march then and there, though he could do much to harass it, the Prussians having hardly any cavalry. Finally he suggested an arrangement by which York's troops should be neutralised. York, to whom some at least of this information was absolutely new, could not come to a decision. Unfortunately for his reputation, he seems to have sought to cover a resolve, which was justifiable on the assumption that there might be a higher law than military duty, but was feeble to the verge of cowardice if looked on simply as a military measure, by a semblance of necessity. His movements during the next few days look as if he wished to be able to plead that he had tried to get to Tilsit, and failed. Diebitsch was naturally unable to tell whether York was or was not really trying to outwit him, but had to retire as York slowly advanced to Tauroggen. At length

[1] Clausewitz, 240.

on the twenty-ninth Clausewitz was sent to show York a letter from Wittgenstein detailing his intended movements, which showed that he would be between Tilsit and Königsberg long before York could arrive there. York had now no alternative, and on the thirtieth agreed to a convention, whereby the Prussians were declared neutral. They were provisionally to occupy a district close to the Niemen, and if the convention were not ratified by either sovereign were to march home unopposed. To make the thing complete, York sent orders to General Massenbach, commanding the Prussian troops that had been taken forward by Macdonald, to return to the main body, which he gladly obeyed. It is to the credit of Macdonald's temper that, at the moment of hearing of York's defection, he dismissed with friendly words a handful of Prussian cavalry who were with his head-quarters.

Macdonald had now no option but to retire hastily on Königsberg, to escape being intercepted by Wittgenstein. A thaw, which greatly impeded Wittgenstein's troops who were marching on by-roads, intervened just at the critical moment; but he might have been between Tilsit and Königsberg some days before if he had marched more rapidly. Buturlin blames him severely for his remissness, pointing out with perfect truth that he was nearer to Tilsit than Macdonald when the latter left Mitau. This, however, is the judgment of a critic wise after the event. Wittgenstein had to move in intense cold, with troops that had already done hard work: it would have availed him little to reach Tilsit with the skeleton of an army. It may even be said that it was fortunate for Russia that Wittgenstein did not move faster: for if he and Macdonald had encountered one another with their full strength, whatever the issue

of the conflict between them, there could have been no opportunity for York's convention.

Macdonald reached Königsberg in safety, though his march was harassed by Diebitsch and Kutusov. He had not troops enough however to maintain himself in Königsberg when the Russians came up, and shared in the general retreat of all the French forces behind the Vistula. York's convention was not disowned on either side; though the King of Prussia thought it right to supersede York pending an inquiry into his conduct, this measure was not in fact carried out, as Wittgenstein would not allow the bearer of the King of Prussia's order to pass through his army. York was ultimately pronounced innocent of any misconduct, as was inevitable when his country had by the Treaty of Kalisch allied itself with Russia against Napoleon. On the merits of the case opinions will probably always differ, according to the sympathies of the critic, or the first principles from which he starts. Its importance also may be exaggerated. Prussia was sure sooner or later to take the step to which York's action pointed, but it powerfully contributed towards inducing Russia to move forwards, instead of remaining for the time content with expelling the invader from her own soil. Thus it brought about what is perhaps the strangest of all results of Napoleon's campaign, the Russian occupation of East Prussia, and the administration of it by Stein, the foremost of German patriots, in the name of a foreign autocrat. This however belongs rather to the history of the *Befreiungskrieg* than to that of Napoleon's invasion of Russia.

Chambray says that Murat was contemplating a stand behind the Pregel, but was compelled by the defection of York to abandon this intention. He gives figures to show

that 44,000 men could have been scraped together, independently of the *débris* of the Moscow army, and argues that this force could easily have resisted Chichagov and Wittgenstein, who had but 40,000 between them. This last estimate seems rather below the mark, and he takes no account either of Platov's pretty large force, or of the fact that the French would have had virtually no cavalry and very little artillery. It is not obvious what would have been gained had this been feasible, still less that it could really have been done. If a mere counting of heads determined superiority, the French might possibly not have been outmatched—but in war even more than in rational debate *sententiæ ponderantur, non numerantur*. As Napoleon said in the course of the Moscow campaign, very wisely as a general maxim though inaptly in the particular instance, war is very largely a matter of opinion. French patriotism may naturally console itself with the thought that, but for the conduct of their allies, things need not have ended so ignominiously. But the calculation is scarcely sounder at bottom, though less extravagant in degree, than Thiers' argument that Napoleon, if he had only called in Macdonald and Schwarzenberg to unite their forces with his own, could have ended the campaign with an overwhelming victory.

When the news of the dissolution of the invading army reached St. Petersburg, the Tzar, who had hitherto remained at the capital engaged in superintending the national defence, thought that the time was come for his return to head-quarters. There the momentous decision could best be taken, whether or not to carry the war into Germany. Accordingly he set out for Vilna, arriving there on the twenty-second of December. His first act was to publish

an amnesty for all inhabitants of Russian Poland who had sided with the invaders. The contrast between Napoleon, who demanded their very lives and gave only words in return, and Alexander, who unconditionally pardoned open rebellion, cannot have failed to impress the Poles greatly, and make them ask themselves whether their fate had not after all left them under the better master.

The state of Vilna was frightful: the hospitals were crowded with Russian sick, suffering in various ways from the effects of exposure to the cold. There were scarcely any resources available, and apparently little goodwill, for the succour of the French prisoners, practically all sick and nearly helpless. The Cossacks on first entering the town had plundered them more or less, which of course made matters worse. If Chambray's statement is not exaggerated, four-fifths of them, something like 15,000, had perished before the Tzar arrived. Their corpses lay in heaps round the buildings to which they had been consigned: and fresh prisoners captured on the road to Kowno, or found wandering about the country, had only added to the number of victims. They had been given bread, but little or nothing more: even for water many of them had only the snow, with no fuel for melting it.[1] This was not the fault of the Russians, who had not wood enough for their own needs. This sounds incredible in a country so thickly wooded as Lithuania; but the fact was that the ordinary supply had ceased during the French occupation, in consequence of the heavy tax imposed by their administration. Gangrene, to which the frost-bitten are always liable in the absence of proper care, spread rapidly; and as a natural consequence of starvation, filth, and putrefaction, an epidemic of typhoid fever set in,

[1] Chambray, iii. 145, n.

which extended to the Russians also. Alexander made great efforts to alleviate their sufferings ; he and his brother Constantine personally visited these abodes of misery and infection, in order to make it clear that he meant his orders to be obeyed, and the latter barely escaped with his life from the fever. The Tzar's aide-de-camp, St. Priest, a French refugee, was charged with the immediate superintendence of the prisoners, and thanks to his unremitting exertions proper hospitals were established, where they were as well treated as the Russian sick. "Presently all the princes whose soldiers had served under Napoleon sent money for the relief of sufferings so exceptional and so undeserved : Napoleon alone sent nothing."[1]

[1] Chambray, iii. 148.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

The effects produced in Europe by the failure of Napoleon's Russian expedition were hardly so great as might have been expected from the magnitude of the disaster. This arose partly from ignorance: it was only by slow degrees that a knowledge of the facts spread abroad. Indeed the full truth was not really known, unless to a few individuals, till long after Napoleon had vanished from the scene. It arose also partly from inability to realise that Napoleon, so persistently victorious, could possibly be overthrown. Men had seen him so long bestride the world like a Colossus, that they failed to understand how the monstrous idol could after all have feet of clay. Much more weight however must be ascribed to the consideration that the catastrophe in no way changed the political interests of the four chief nations of Europe. Their relative strength was doubtless altered; the anticipations of their statesmen, as to what might be hoped or feared in the near future, were considerably modified. But at bottom their attitude was almost the same as twelve months before. France was still obedient to Napoleon, still aspiring to dominate Europe, though her resources were visibly less. England was still determined to fight Napoleon to the death, though more confidently now that Russia had proved herself unexpectedly firm and strong. Austria was still, to use an expressive slang phrase,

sitting on the fence. Russia had in no way altered her relations with the other three, but her Tzar was slowly making up his mind to offer himself as the liberator of Europe from Napoleon's sway.

Opinion in France found no expression through the press, so that there is little means of determining the drift of public feeling. French accounts of a later date are inevitably distorted by the violent political passions aroused through Napoleon's fall and the restoration of the Bourbons, by the rapid, often shameless, changes of party in which many prominent personages indulged. Hence the best guide one can have is a competent foreign observer, though of these there were but few. There exists however an interesting confidential report[1] sent to Metternich late in November by the Austrian *chargé d'affaires* at Paris. In it he reviews the course of public opinion in the French capital since the beginning of the war. As usual in Paris, it seems to have passed rapidly from one phase to another, but one feeling was always present — the desire for peace. At the outset every one expected easy and rapid victory, and therefore speedy peace; and discouragement became general when the first month of the campaign brought no results. The reported victory at Smolensk produced no particular effect, not because there was any suspicion of its Cadmean nature, but because it coincided with the defeat of Salamanca and with the discovery that the assurances which had been published, that the Treaty of Bucharest would never be ratified by the Porte, had proved illusory. The battle of Borodino was imagined by the Parisians to be another Eylau, not very wrongly, though they had no

[1] V. A. Frankr. Corr. 307. Berichte Lefevre's, no. 32 B.

information except Napoleon's bulletin claiming a crushing victory. The news of the capture of Moscow sent every one into ecstasies, as they took for granted that it must finish the war: the news of the fire drove them to despair, because they saw in it a declaration of war to the death. "The cry became universal—it is a second Spanish war." Every unfavourable turn roused more or less feeling of discontent against the government, especially among the commercial classes, who had been hoping in vain for a renewal of trade with Russia; but there is no hint of any active hostility, of any possibility of a revolt against the Empire. Indeed, the Mallet conspiracy strengthened Napoleon's personal hold on France, by destroying confidence in the police who virtually governed in his absence, and suggesting the disquieting reflection that chaos would follow if he were really dead, as Mallet had asserted. All the greater therefore was the discouraging effect of the later bulletins; not from what they said, but from what they left unsaid, they caused a general uneasiness, none the less real because somewhat vague.

This Austrian report was sent off before the three weeks of silence, which naturally excited universal apprehension. The police did their best to keep up the public confidence, by inserting in the papers reports purporting to come from London and elsewhere that Russia was in a bad way; but this worn-out device produced little effect. When at length the twenty-ninth bulletin appeared, and was followed almost immediately by the announcement that the Emperor had returned, the Parisians felt it as a relief. They did not really know the worst; gradually, as officers who had escaped from Russia with barely their lives returned home

invalided, more of the truth leaked out, though even so the vast proportion of officers among the survivors tended to conceal from Parisian society the extent of loss among the rank and file who were personally unknown. All the world knew that the army was still facing the enemy, though its weakness was not disclosed. All the world knew also that the Emperor exhibited a confident demeanour, and they relied as before on his military skill and energy. Patriotic feeling was also roused; none liked to seem lukewarm when it was a question of avenging France on the barbarous Russians: none were willing to believe that the domination of France in Europe was likely to be impaired. Thus the Russian failure hardly weakened Napoleon's position at home, so far as Paris represented France. In the provinces the dumb revolt against war, the loathing for the ever-increasing blood tax of the conscription, by no means decreased; but it was after all dumb, and it carried with it no dream of any other ruler. The elements in France hostile to Napoleon's *régime* remained hostile, perhaps grew a little stronger; but the bulk of the nation still trusted him, still hoped that he would yet give them the blessings of peace, without diminution of the glory for which at heart they cared even more.

England, thanks to the enterprise of the press and to the habit of promptly publishing official news, had been on the whole better informed than any other nation as to the progress of the campaign. In England it was believed possible, earlier than anywhere else, that Napoleon might fail. In fact opinion, as represented by the newspapers, was rather premature in expecting it. The character of Napoleon's bulletins was notorious, and there

was far less experience as to what Russians could do in the way of concealment or exaggeration. Salamanca was rightly believed to have shaken to its foundations the French power in Spain. The tide had so visibly turned that people grew impatient, blamed the government for not having already induced Austria to take the field, looked for a speedy end to the Empire in France. The government, less sanguine, had no reason to change its policy. England's interest was simple, the return of peace through Napoleon's overthrow. Secure in her naval supremacy, she needed not to care keenly about the balance of military strength on the Continent. Russian ambition could not hurt her; she honestly desired the recovery of Austrian and Prussian independence, but was not sensitive as to the chance of their being overshadowed by their eastern neighbour. The English government was fully convinced of the sincerity of the Tzar, who had given the strongest possible proof of his confidence in England, by entrusting his fleet to her protection. Hence it was active, within limits of prudence, in striving to establish good relations between Austria and Russia, though the extreme caution of Metternich prevented Austria from taking any overt steps. Hence also Austria and Prussia, while fully relying on English aid when the time should come, could hardly help feeling that their point of view was somewhat different from hers.

If one attempts to trace the gradual hardening of the policy of Austria and Prussia during the autumn of 1812, it is well always to bear in mind how much time was expended in carrying communications. From the nature of the case great caution and the profoundest secrecy were essential. Hardenberg and Metternich not only wrote

every word of their confidential letters with their own hands, but waited some time until convenient opportunities arose for sending them. Hence it took weeks before they could interchange views on any new occasion; and as events moved rapidly after Napoleon quitted Moscow, and were known but slowly and partially, they were never in a position to judge of things as they were. The significance of the burning of Moscow was appreciated at once by Hardenberg: though reports were then, as opinions are still, at variance as to the true authors of the conflagration, it was clear that Russia was not dismayed by the sacrifice. The assurances which the Tzar hastened to give to Lord Cathcart, that the loss of Moscow in no way shook his resolve, were communicated by his instructions to the two German powers, with the further declaration that he earnestly desired to see the complete restoration of their independence. From this to the suggestion that Austria and Prussia should agree upon a policy of hostility to Napoleon was but a step. The Tzar professed that he had no wish to inquire into their secrets; he only offered his concurrence in liberating Europe. As this communication was despatched when Napoleon was still in possession of the Russian capital, it had something of the air of asking them to liberate Russia. Since it necessarily was sent by a circuitous route, it took several weeks in reaching even Hardenberg: but so little of later events had transpired that Metternich, when at the beginning of November he declared against any immediate action, was still of opinion that Russia was conquered. The Prussian government had more confidence in the efficiency of Russian resistance, and though feeling it to be impossible to change openly without the co-operation of Austria, took the first step towards

independence by refusing to send any reinforcements on the ground of poverty, and pressing more urgently than ever a settlement of accounts with France. According to Hardenberg's statements the contributions exacted from Prussia, including some 50,000 horses taken away by force from trade and agriculture, exceeded by several millions of money the balance of the war indemnity imposed on Prussia in 1807. Whether the demand ever went beyond Maret may be doubted: but in face of the systematic and merciless way in which Napoleon fleeced every state that could not resist him, no more significant step could be taken than answering his demand by a counter demand for money.

It may be presumed that if Metternich could have foreseen the total destruction of the Grand Army he would have acted differently. He was always haunted by fears of Russian ambition, which in more quarters than one was threatening to Austrian interests, and would regard the decisive triumph of Russia as little less ominous than Napoleon's complete success. Hence probably he would have assented to the German powers taking part against Napoleon, in order that Russia alone might not reap all the credit derivable from baffling the great conqueror. He never however had the opportunity: no inkling of the full truth reached him until it was far too late to act.

It was the news of Lauriston's errand to the Tzar, though unaccompanied by any indication of how it had been treated, which, reaching Metternich just a month later, induced him to take the first step towards assuming the part of mediator. Supposing that if Napoleon wished for peace, as this indicated, Russia would probably listen,

he instructed Floret,[1] now at Vilna, to suggest to Maret his willingness to undertake the task of negotiating it. Nothing came or could come of this suggestion, in view of the resolve of the Tzar to admit of no negotiations while there were enemies on Russian soil. It marks however the first definite step taken by Austria towards casting off her dependence. Metternich could obviously go no further, so long as he retained the belief that Russia would for the time be crushed. The war might, he thought, be trusted materially to weaken Napoleon: if the balance should contrary to expectation incline more against him, so much the better. In any case however the strength of Austria was to sit still, to retain her existing relations with other powers, both to maintain the ostensible ones arising out of her treaty with France, and to keep buried in the profoundest secrecy her confidential relations with England and Prussia, above all with Russia. The winter, he assumed, would compel a cessation of active hostilities; both parties would have time to reflect on what the struggle was costing, and might accept Austria as the mediator to bring about a general peace.

This being Metternich's object, it was natural that he should refuse to listen to any kind of overtures from Russia. His confidential letters to Stackelberg during November are full of protests against the extreme indiscretion of the Russian government in sending, or allowing to be sent, any kind of communications which suggested there being any relation between the two powers, other than the official one of war with limited liability. He refused to listen to Lord

[1] V. A. F. 297, An Floret, 1812. There are several despatches of the same date, the fourth of November, the most important being sent in cypher.

Walpole, a member of the British embassy to Russia, who was sent to Vienna on the Tzar's instance, though with Cathcart's approval, in the hope that an Englishman might be better received at Vienna under the circumstances than a Russian agent. He reserved himself for the opportunity which he now felt sure would arise: but the news came so slowly that Napoleon had already quitted Russia when Metternich's famous despatch of the ninth of December was sent to Floret at Vilna. This document, taken in connection with the private letter to Floret accompanying it,[1] indicates clearly the Austrian point of view. There is no hostility to Napoleon's *régime:* rather is the Kaiser's personal connection with the new French dynasty insisted on, as a reason why Austria is to be deemed friendly to France as well as to the other powers, and therefore best fitted to mediate between them. At the same time there is a veiled hint, in references to the numbers and sentiments of the Austrian people, that if Napoleon turns a deaf ear Austria is not to be despised as a further antagonist. England, Metternich sees, is not likely to be eager for peace just at the moment when everything is going well with her, for he is quite alive to the full importance of Salamanca. And Russia he thinks is too deeply committed to England to treat of peace without her concurrence. Thus the only chance of a general peace lies in Napoleon being ready to listen to reason. This however was exactly what Napoleon had never done yet, what to the end he could never induce himself to do. Never was a man less capable of taking to heart the moral deducible from the old tale of the Sibylline books. There was not however much present hope for Metternich's scheme on the other side:

[1] Both are printed in Oncken, i. 381—6.

Castlereagh[1] hit the fatal blot when he pointed out that to listen to Austrian overtures would commit Russia, while Napoleon would be free to repudiate them as not made by himself. Austria had to maintain her ambiguous attitude for some months longer, while seeing the Prussian government drawn by the irresistible impulse of the nation into open alliance with the enemies of France.

Napoleon himself was, or chose to appear, convinced that his alliances were permanently in the interest of all parties, and that therefore his allies would support him to any extent. From Dresden he wrote[2] to the Emperor Francis asking for 30,000 more men, as if it were not a new departure, but an obvious consequence from the state of affairs. His first letter[3] from Paris was to inform Berthier that Prussia was sending reinforcements to protect her territory. His conversation[4] on the last day of the year with Count Bubna, who had been sent to Paris by Metternich to repeat his suggestion of Austrian mediation, was all in the same key. Much of it was devoted to denying or explaining away his disasters: but in the rest he assumed that Austria's interest was to stand by him, and he asserted positively both that the Prussian government would increase its contingent for the next campaign, and that the Prussian people was friendly to him and afraid of the Russians. In a letter[5] to the Emperor of

[1] Castlereagh to Cathcart, the fifteenth of December, R. O. Russia, 200.

[2] Nap. Corr. 19,385.

[3] Nap. Corr. 19,386.

[4] Bubna's Report, V. A. Frankreich, Varia 1812.

[5] This letter is omitted in Nap. Corr., the editors giving instead a note explaining their reasons for thinking it a mere draft prepared by Maret, but not actually sent. It is accepted by most historians, and is

Austria dated a week later he repeated in more detail the same lame explanations, and made the same assumptions for the future. Whether all this was deliberate fiction employed for obvious diplomatic reasons, or whether any self-deception entered into it, can only be conjectured. Napoleon's activity all through the winter is conclusive evidence that he was under no illusion as to the extent of military preparations necessary for repairing his losses.

The extent of these losses in the course of the campaign cannot be estimated with any accuracy. Much will depend on the method of calculation; but some general results can easily be obtained. The total number of the troops that entered Russia has already been given, at p. 59, from Chambray's tables as 630,058. There returned in fighting condition nothing but the two wings under Macdonald and Schwarzenberg, numbering some 60,000 at the most; and of these more than a quarter were lost to Napoleon's cause by York's convention. From the main army there escaped a certain number of thousands, entirely disorganised, largely officers without soldiers. Their value for future service was inestimable; probably without their aid in stiffening his new levies Napoleon could hardly have held his head up in 1813, but for the time they counted for nothing. The remainder, amounting to over half a million, had disappeared. Some few had been badly wounded early in the campaign and had returned disabled, some no doubt of the stragglers escaped ultimately to their homes; but these would be in all but a mere handful. Half a million of men at the least were left behind in Russia: how many

printed at length in Oncken, i. 393. Whether it was sent in this form or not is a question of secondary interest, as it in no way contradicts the report given by Bubna.

of these perished, how many were taken prisoners and were liberated at the conclusion of the war, can only be vaguely estimated. Buturlin gives nearly 200,000 as the official figure for the number of prisoners; but how many of these were captured only to die? At any rate the whole were lost to the fighting strength of France for the rest of the war, and very much more than half were permanently lost to their respective countries. And if we add the number of Russians who perished, for calculating which very imperfect materials exist, but for which 150,000 would be a low estimate, we come back to nearly half a million of human lives sacrificed, not to a great cause, not even in a real national conflict, but to gratify the insatiable lust of power of a single man.

What percentage of this loss fell upon France, as distinguished from the subject peoples, can only be vaguely intimated. It is certain that a relatively large number of French officers escaped: it is indeed remarkable that no single officer of higher rank than general of division perished, though several were wounded. And it is asserted by some writers, with much plausibility, that a large proportion of the stragglers at the outset were Germans and others who had no love for Napoleon's service. At the lowest, the loss to France was enormous, and the patriotism of the French nation in not being altogether discouraged, and in replenishing the army, was remarkable also, even when allowance has been made for the great severity with which the conscription was enforced. Nevertheless the blow was really fatal: for all his astounding efforts Napoleon was never again a match for his enemies in fighting strength. The ranks of his infantry were fairly renewed, but the conscripts were necessarily less efficient than the veterans

who had fallen in Russia, and even these were more easily replaced than the lost material of war. The artillery and cavalry had entirely disappeared, and it was simply impossible to replace 200,000 trained horses. It was his weakness in these arms which was most conspicuous at the opening of the campaign of 1813.

The expectations formed in England, if not elsewhere, as to the failure of Napoleon's great enterprise had been realised, more completely than the most sanguine had at the outset ventured to imagine. The time was come when he must choose between abandoning his dream of universal dominion, and staking everything on the chance of recovering his mastery of Europe. He chose as was to be expected of his character; and probably it was good for the world in the long run that he did so choose. His first great failure had taught him neither moderation in his lust of power, nor distrust of his own infallibility. He could not, or would not, see the elements of weakness in his own position, the growing strength of the resistance to his pretensions, any more than he had been able to appreciate the inherent difficulties of the task in which he had just broken down.

Jomini gives a long list of reasons why Napoleon's invasion of Russia failed, including his getting less assistance out of Lithuania than he had calculated on, and Turkey and Sweden making peace with Russia. Some are mere criticisms on errors or omissions which, however real, were not of capital importance. The main reason, though Jomini only mentions it as a sort of deduction from the break-down of some of the arrangements for supply, was that it was too big to work. Every possible provision had been made beforehand, but it was impossible to get the

supplies to the troops unless they moved too slowly to achieve anything. To use an apparent bull, the invasion of Russia could only succeed if it never took place, in other words if the threatening attitude of an army in overwhelming numbers caused Russia to give way. Alexander stood firm, and his people supported him: provided that they did so, the invasion was bound to fail. Napoleon's management of the campaign was not faultless, but his enemies made more and greater mistakes. He tempted Providence by ignoring the approach of winter, and paid dearly for it in losing scores of thousands of men unnecessarily; but he was beaten before the first snow-flake fell. He achieved a considerable measure of success, greater perhaps than any other man could have achieved, but he could not overcome time and space.

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THE END.

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